



2010

A RHETORIC OF CHANGE: CHURCH GROWTH AND SOCIAL CHANGE AT THE RICHMOND OUTREACH CENTER

Rebekah Holbrook
Virginia Commonwealth University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd>

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

© The Author

Downloaded from

<https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/149>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.

© Rebekah A. Holbrook 2010
All Rights Reserved

A Rhetoric of Change: Church Growth and Social Change
at the Richmond Outreach Center

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

Rebekah Anne Holbrook
Bachelor of Arts, The College of William and Mary, 2005
Master of Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2010

Director: Dr. David Coogan
Associate Professor, Department of English

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
December 2010

Acknowledgment

The author wishes to thank several people. I would like to thank my parents, Fred and Laura, for their patience and unending support. Without them I would not have such faith in myself. I would also like to thank my sister, Mary Beth and brother, Philip for their kindness, humor, and patience during the many holidays I spent researching and writing. Many thanks go to my friends who remind me to laugh. A special thanks goes to Dave Coogan for being such a great teacher and guide through my graduate experience.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	xvi
Introduction	1
A Brief History of the Richmond Outreach Center	3
Studying rhetorics of change	10
Literature Review	16
Rhetorical success and the problem of audience	16
Rhetoric and religion: charisma, ethos, and logics of articulation	22
Gramsci on religion, politics, and ideology	25
Religion, class experiences, and consent	32
Creating an oppositional stance	37
“Change” in public discourse about Richmond	51
Rhetorical Analysis	62
Introduction	62
Assessing the rhetorical performance	63
Assessing the texts: structure, common topics and themes	69
Themes of personal responsibility and fighting	77
On therapeutic discourse.....	87
Conclusion	89

Abstract

A RHETORIC OF CHANGE: CHURCH GROWTH AND SOCIAL CHANGE AT THE RICHMOND OUTREACH CENTER

By Rebekah Anne Holbrook, MA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2010.

Major Director: Dr. David Coogan, Associate Professor, Department of English

The Richmond Outreach Center “The ROC” is an independent soulwinning megachurch in Richmond, Virginia. This thesis explores how rhetoric plays a role in the rapid growth of this church and considers the church’s response—rhetorically and politically—to the city’s social issues. Through a rhetorical analysis of sermons and texts by Geronimo Aguilar, the ROC’s founder and pastor, it is concluded that Aguilar has generated a rhetoric of change that says social change must come to Richmond. Aguilar galvanizes an audience by articulating roles for individuals within his vision and linking the ideological and material concerns of his congregants and the city’s poor. His rhetorical strategies and rhetorical performances indicate that he follows logics of articulation rather than logics of influence. These findings may be useful to social movement and church leaders.

Introduction

It's six o'clock on a Saturday, and the traffic is backing up on Midlothian Turnpike, a four-lane route on the southern side of Richmond, Virginia. In the middle of an intersection, two middle-aged men in orange safety vests redirect traffic away from the gigantic parking lot already full of minivans sporting "Satan Sucks!" bumper stickers, giant pick-up trucks, and Harley Davidsons. A fleet of school buses splattered with "R.O.C." in large graffiti letters lines one side of the lot. I was instructed to park across the street in front of a mechanic's garage and with a trio of women—a mother, daughter, and granddaughter—we cross the four-lane highway. At the end of the crowded parking lot sits the Richmond Outreach Center, housed in a nondescript warehouse, painted a dull grey, with a red metal roof and no windows.

Inside the atrium, the place is alive with activity. Visitors are greeted by an enthusiastic "Welcome!" and a handshake from the ushers. Behind the greeters, dozens of people mill around in front of entrance to the gym. It's a diverse crowd of blacks and whites, children and adults. Most people are dressed casually; some of them wear leather biking vests and jeans. Over to the right, in the ROC Café, people are finishing up sodas and french fries served in red-checkered paper containers. Children dart in and out of the newly opened bookstore and Jesus Couture boutique. A shiny black Harley Davidson motorcycle sits behind felt ropes in the lobby, just like those cars in shopping malls that you can enter to win. The scene actually feels more like a shopping mall or rock concert than a church.

Following the crowd into the auditorium, we find a seat along the back wall, about mid-way up the bleachers. But we don't sit. Instead we join the crowd, already on

their feet, swaying and clapping and singing along to the words projected on three giant screens throughout the gym. The rock-band and team of singers cycle through several upbeat praise songs until Pastor Geronimo Aguilar joins the praise band on the stage. The crowd cheers enthusiastically. Now the bleachers on all sides of the gym are full, and ushers are frantically adding chairs to accommodate the crowd of more than 2,000.

Aguilar welcomes the ecstatic crowd, and invites to the stage a special guest—Republican Governor Bob McDonnell. The Governor of Virginia thanks Aguilar for his work, in partnership with the Richmond Police Department, to reduce violence and suspensions at a local high school. He thanks all the ROC members for their efforts to help the homeless and hungry. Finally, he prays with the crowd, asking God to bless Aguilar and his church and bless the work they do to positively impact the city of Richmond.

Although the ROC has the backing of Governor McDonnell, in this conservative southern city, when someone says church, most people do not imagine this scene—a 2,000-person auditorium, pulsing rock music, an audience of blacks and whites worshipping together, people sporting tattoos and leather biker vests singing and praying alongside soccer moms and men in ties. One does not imagine a young Latino preacher talking excitedly about how the audience needs to commit their time and resources to helping the poor and that everyone, rich and poor, is responsible for making the city of Richmond a better place. But this is what a visitor will see at the Richmond Outreach Center, an independent soul winning church with a mission to “Change Lives and Create Life Changers” in the city of Richmond. The soul winning operation started in 2001 with just 19 members; it has grown to more than 2,000 members today. In 2007, Outreach

Magazine listed the ROC as the fifth fastest growing church in America (“The 2007 Outreach 100”).

As a soul winning operation, the ROC canvasses the city each week, talking to strangers about Jesus Christ. The church’s primary goal is to save more souls for Christ and according to Aguilar, the ROC uses its 150 programs that reach out to the city’s poor, as a means of reaching people with the gospel. Part of what allows the ROC to achieve growth, implement large-scale social programming, and to save more souls are the fascinating rhetorical performances of Geronimo Aguilar, the founder and pastor of the ROC. His speeches and texts display a system of persuasion or rhetoric of change in which he invokes roles for individual members of the audience as agents of change for Richmond.

A Brief History of the Richmond Outreach Center

Geronimo Aguilar or “Pastor G” as he is affectionately called, is a 40-year-old Mexican American who relocated to Richmond from Los Angeles in 2001 to establish an urban ministry. Aguilar is tall and muscular, with an olive complexion, shaved head, and tattooed arms. Although he’s often seen wearing glasses, button-down dress shirts and jeans, when dressed in leather and pictured next to his Harley Davidson, Aguilar looks a lot like the Hollywood celebrity Vin Diesel. Unlike most Hollywood celebrities, Aguilar carries the New Testament in the back pocket of his faded jeans. But he didn’t used to. Twenty-three years ago Aguilar was a gang member and drug addicted teen living on the streets of Los Angeles. At 17 he found Jesus. Aguilar believes God used him, an abandoned street kid, to build a thriving urban outreach ministry in Richmond. He believes God can use anyone to do great things.

As he tells it in a 2001 interview with the Richmond-based *Style Weekly Magazine*, Aguilar's story reads like something from a Christian best seller. He was three when his father abandoned him and his mother in New York. At eight, he witnessed his mother's murder at the hands of his step-father. By age 17 he had become a drug-addicted dropout and gang member in Los Angeles. One day, high on drugs, Aguilar wandered the streets of Anaheim, desperate, about to take his life. But when he passed a neighborhood church, something told him to come in. "I'd never been to church in my life — something prompted me to go over there. I didn't even know if it would be open. It was Tuesday, and I thought God only worked on Sunday" he has said (qtd. in Singh). The pastor there, a man with tattoos and long hair, told Geronimo his own story of pain, drugs, incarceration, and redemption. After a few minutes, this Pastor asked Geronimo if he wanted to accept Jesus. "I accepted Jesus the first time anyone ever shared the gospel with me...the first time!" Aguilar says ("Testimonial"). Afterward, the pastor pulled out a photograph of a son he hadn't seen in 14 years. Aguilar was stunned. He was staring at a photograph of himself. Geronimo Aguilar had walked into his own father's church.

After being reunited with Phil Aguilar, the leader of the Set Free Christian Fellowship in Southern California, Geronimo gave up drugs and joined his father's ministry. He became ordained through that ministry in 1990. After several years working in his father's group homes and traveling with a Christian rock band, Geronimo relocated to Richmond with his wife Samantha and 19 others. With the backing of a few local evangelical churches, this group launched an urban outreach center in a small warehouse on the Southside of Richmond in 2001 (Singh, 1).

Just nine years later, the ROC moved to a new, \$13 million facility called the Big House, equipped with an auditorium, Laundromat, café, bookstore, hair salon, dance studio, food pantry, and recording studio. They moved in debt free. According to the National Center for Charitable Statistics, the Richmond Outreach Center, Inc. and the Richmond Outreach Center Real Estate Foundation together have assets of more than \$18 million (“Organization Profile”). The church’s revenue has grown considerably in the past nine years. According to their tax returns, found on the Foundation Center website, most of their revenue comes from contributions, gifts and grants, excluding government grants. In 2001, they raised \$193,307 (“Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax” 2001). By 2004, which is the first year their tax return includes income from the sale of inventory, their revenue had grown to \$1,319,029, with more than \$500,000 of that coming in through sales (“Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax” 2004). By their most recent filing date in 2008, the ROC’s revenue had reached \$5,317,457, with more than \$5 million of that coming in as contributions and grants (“Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax” 2008). Most of their revenue goes to services, although in 2008 they spent about 2 million on their programs for young people and the poor, which is less than half of what they brought in (“Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax” 2008). They serve poor people, and according to Aguilar, most of their congregants are poor, however, the church has strong financial backing from somewhere, most likely local churches and individual donors, because they receive very little support through government grants.

Financial security has enabled the ROC to branch out from their original services: the after-school program, food pantry, and rehabilitation homes. Their focus still remains

soulwinning and service to the poor. But now they offer weekly worship services, Bible study, a day-care, dance program, sports leagues, a mixed-martial arts club for youth, a bus ministry and a skate park (“Ministries Listing”). They run the largest bus ministry in Virginia, which picks up more than 1,000 kids from Richmond’s housing projects every Saturday for activities, lunch, and worship. They’ve started the ROC School of Urban Ministry (RSUM) and house an independent elementary school for inner-city kids called Elijah House. The ROC also runs a thrift store, health clinic, and outreach centers in Petersburg and Danville, Virginia (“Ministries Listing”).

In a recently published document on their website, the ROC has tried to quantify their impact on the community: they claim to have been responsible for a decrease in violence and incidents at George Wythe high school where they volunteer, a decrease in crime in the Henrico county public housing where they have a presence and claim to have saved tax-payers \$2,123,310 in 2009 by rehabilitating offenders in their discipleship homes rather than sending them to jail (“How We Impact the Community”). From Aguilar’s book, *Soulwinning is Not a Gift*, in just eight years the ROC claims to have saved 90,000 souls through their outreach efforts and soulwinning (39). In 2009 the ROC had 19 members; today they have a membership of more than 2,000.

This is a remarkable increase in membership and financial assets for a megachurch in an urban setting that serves poor people. The ROC’s growing popularity among Christians is also remarkable, in light of declining church membership and trends toward secularization in America. According to the 2008 American Religious Identification survey, Americans are slowly becoming less religious: 86% of Americans identified as Christians in 1990 and 76% identified as Christian in 2008 (Kosmin & Keysar 1). The

same report indicated that the number of people who are unaffiliated with any religion has grown. According to the 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey done by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, more than 28% of Americans are no longer affiliated with the faith they grew up in (“Summary of Key Findings” 1).

Yet this trend toward secularization seems to affect some theological traditions but not others. The ARIS report showed that Mainline Christian churches have experienced the steepest decline in the number of people who identify with their denominations, particularly since 2001 (6). According to Pew, the Mainline category typically includes Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Anglican/Episcopalian and Traditional Baptist denominations (“Summary of Key Findings” 1). These mainline denominations have experienced decline while the evangelical church in America grows. According to a data collected in 2007 by The Pew Forum, the number of U.S. Protestants who say they are affiliated with evangelical churches (26.3%) has surpassed that of mainline Protestant churches (18.1%) or Catholic churches (23.9%) (“Summary of Key Findings” 1).

Likewise, evangelical churches are growing. Organizations that are theologically evangelical typically attract people who identify as “born-again” Christians, and this accounts for a growing number of Protestants in the United States. Since 1976, when Gallup began asking Americans if they considered themselves to be “born-again” this number has fluctuated somewhere between 35-48% but has shown a growth trend overall (Winesman 1). According to The Barna Group, 84 million Americans identify themselves as evangelicals today (“Survey Explores Who Qualifies as an Evangelical” 1).

A corresponding growth trend is among large churches known as megachurches. The Hartford Institute has studied the composition of the American megachurch and currently

defines the megachurch as any church with a weekly attendance of more than 2,000 people (“Megachurch Definition” 1). More than 1,200 American churches currently qualify as megachurches, but they range in size from 2,000 to 35,000 members. Many megachurches are also theologically evangelical. Of 403 megachurches surveyed by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research in 2005, 56% of them were theologically evangelical, nearly 34% were nondenominational, and 16% were Southern Baptist (“Megachurch Definition” 1). About 60 percent of American megachurches are found in the Sunbelt region. They are typically located on highly visible plots of land on the outskirts of metropolitan cities, within reach of major highways (“Megachurch Definition” 1).

The most common explanations for the growth of large evangelical churches in America, and the decline in Mainline church membership focus on theological, institutional and sociological factors. However, there seems to be very little consideration of how rhetoric might play a role. Richard Inskip, a church growth historian, reviews research on the theological, institutional and social factors that affect church health in his contributions to the book *Church and Denominational Growth*. As he explains it, research done from the theological perspective considers church growth in terms of successful conversions attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit. Research on institutional factors for church growth focus on the style of worship services, the range of programs offered, marketing strategies, organizational structure or strictness of religious beliefs (135). From the social science perspective, researchers focus on cultural context as well as demographic changes such as population shifts and their impact on church membership (136-37).

While not disregarding theological or institutional factors, social context—and the church’s response to social context—may be the most important factor to study when considering the health of urban churches in America. In urban settings, racial divisions, and economic disparity make populations more transitory and cultural shifts more rapid than in rural and racially homogenous regions of the country, and as a result churches must change to remain relevant. While Inskeep says it is evident congregations “cannot control their contexts,” he believes “they can control their relationship to their contexts” (147). Other researchers agree. Inskeep describes a 1982 study where the author concluded that in order to stop the decline of church membership churches needed to radically change their identities and come up with “new avenues of entry for newcomers.” As the author continues, unfortunately “most churches do not react in time; they dwindle and die or move to neighborhoods where racial transition is not yet a problem” (qtd. in Inskeep 147).

A theme that comes up frequently in literature on church growth is the Christian church’s ability to respond quickly and appropriately to the social context or population they are trying to reach. However, there is little written from a rhetorical viewpoint that considers how urban church leaders communicate about their social setting and in particular how they respond to social issues that need redress. Yet, the methods of rhetorical analysis and theories on the nature of rhetorical discourse would lend themselves easily to the study of speech events and the composition of texts within churches. For example, a correlate to the social responsiveness of some urban churches, within the rhetorical tradition, is the ability to develop the right message and gauge the

appropriate time to speak, known as the principle of *kairos*. A successful rhetor, like a successful church, adapts to best reach a particular audience.

As Kenneth Burke writes in *A Rhetoric of Religion* “what we say about words in the empirical realm will bear a notable likeness to what is said about God, in theology” (14). In Geronimo Aguilar’s sermons and texts presented at the ROC, what he says about theological or spiritual change resembles what he says about social change. And so, rather than rely on theological, institutional, and contextual explanations for the rapid growth of the Richmond Outreach Center since 2001, this study considers the possibility that Aguilar’s church is growing so rapidly because of the language he uses to describe change and the rhetorical methods he uses to construct a system of persuasion or *rhetoric of change*.

Studying Rhetorics of Change

According to the ROC’s web site, the organization has three main foci: Changing the City, Winning the Lost, and Reaching the Next Generation. They say it is “vitaly important for The ROC to not only reach but to change Richmond, Virginia, with the love of Jesus Christ” (“What is the ROC?” 1). My study of Aguilar’s texts starts with that first focal point: “reaching” and “changing” the city of Richmond. From the way Aguilar crafts a persona for himself and an aesthetic for his church, it is evident he is trying to reach a particular audience—the inner city poor, members of the working and middle class, young people, and evangelical Christians. This analysis studies the way Aguilar projects a vision of change for his congregation and the city as well as how he communicates that change must happen—whether it is an interpersonal or material change. Rhetorical critic Michael McGee describes a rhetoric of control, for example, as

“a system of persuasion presumed to be effective on the whole community” or a rhetoric of war made to “persuade us of war’s necessity” (6). Aguilar’s *rhetoric of change* is a system of persuasion designed to influence his congregants, and the unchurched, to believe change is necessary and to envision themselves as agents of change.

My study of the ROC draws on ethnographic observation of the church services, sociological explanations for church growth and rhetorical theories about audience and rhetorical situations. To collect observations of the church, I visited the ROC several times over the course of about 12 months, took notes on their worship services and spoke to parishioners. This informs my description of the church and its congregation. I have also read literature on church growth and decline in United States and studies on trends toward secularization. I have done a brief comparison between the ROC’s Statement of Beliefs and the Southern Baptist Convention’s Statement of Faith. Comparing the two shows how the ROC’s theology is tied to its urban context and to the particular audience Aguilar addresses. I have also provided a brief overview of the evolution of the seeker-sensitive approach to church marketing used by other American megachurches, to show how Aguilar is following many of these same practices. To demonstrate that Aguilar and his church have cultivated an urban aesthetic that other Richmond clergy have not, I have compared the ROC to two churches that serve similar populations and provide services to the poor.

Aguilar’s texts were selected for analysis from the ROC’s website, where I listened to and transcribed about 10 sermons, and from Aguilar’s weekly devotionals, which I receive via email. I have read and annotated approximately 30 of these devotionals. I have also read one of Aguilar’s books titled *Soulwinning is Not a Gift*. In addition to

reading these texts I have spent hours on the ROC websites, the original and the new version, updated in April 2010. Here I have read about the church's history, their statement of faith, descriptions of their 150 ministries, news stories about the ROC, biographies on Aguilar and the ROC's associate pastors, and reports on the impact of their work in the city. Though I attempted to interview Aguilar, I never received a response to my request.

The textual analysis presented here considers particular elements of the rhetorical culture of the city that Aguilar draws on to construct his sermons and devotionals. According to Condit and Lucaites, rhetorical culture is the range of linguistic usages including “allusions, characterizations, ideographs, images, metaphors, myths, narratives, and topoi” appropriate to a particular historical audience (xii). In this study I considered the elements of rhetorical culture Aguilar selects appropriate to this particular historical audience—Richmond's poor and working class, minority groups, children and youth. These elements include an urban aesthetic, lowbrow humor, allusions to sports and popular culture, an emphasis on practical applications of the scriptures rather than the teaching of theology, and simply constructed sermons, which often use anaphora, or the repetition of words or phrases in successive clauses.

I have also noticed other elements of the rhetorical traditional present in Aguilar's performances and texts. For example, he demonstrates an awareness of ethos. Ethos, as understood by the ancient Greeks, refers to the speakers' authority and was important particularly when making ethical appeals. Without gaining the respect and trust of the audience it would be difficult to persuade them on ethical issues. Aguilar constructs ethos by retelling his own narrative of change and this gives him authority to speak on matters

of spiritual and material change. He maintains an appearance and speaking style that reflects urban culture, and rarely does Aguilar have to code switch, from talking like a professional clergyman to talking like a former gang member and street kid. He draws on the rhetorical culture of the inner city intuitively perhaps because it is the rhetorical culture with which he is personally most familiar. The rapid growth of Aguilar's church and the loyalty of his followers indicate Aguilar may also be a charismatic leader who understands the Greek principle of *kairos* or right timing for taking action or speaking.

I have chosen to focus on the concept of "change" because it permeates conversations about Richmond and represents the region's resistance to change and desire to progress. "Change" in discourse about Richmond has become what Michael McGee calls the ideograph, which is a common term representing the "collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal" (15). McGee developed the ideograph as a unit of discourse analysis in an effort to better understand the relationship between rhetoric and ideology, particularly as they address material conditions. Ideographs, according to McGee are "one-term sums of an orientation...that will be used to symbolize the argument" (7).

For a complete understanding of ideology one will analyze the diachronic or historical structure of an ideograph as well as synchronic relationships to other ideographs in a particular moment in time (10-14). An example of an ideograph analysis that accounts for both the historical usages and present usages of an ideograph is found in Condit and Lucaites' book *Crafting Equality: America's Anglo-African Word*. They trace how the ideograph "equality" has evolved over the course of American history and study it in relationship to other abstract words and phrases, demonstrating a tension between

equality as it was originally conceived philosophically and politically and how it this meaning changes through everyday public discourse (xv-xviii). They mean to explain how Americans have “talked themselves into a national identity” through various usages of the term “equality” (xvii).

The ideograph analysis presented here considers the way change is projected in public discourse about Richmond over the last seventeen years as well as an analysis of how “change” works in relationship to other terms in Aguilar’s texts. “Change” is an ideograph found in both public discourse about Richmond and within texts generated at the ROC, and it symbolizes various arguments for change as well as arguments that say change is impossible. In Richmond, people talk about the city’s preservation of history, it’s resistance to change, the progress made to change by healing racial divisions, and the belief that change can’t come unless people work together. In public discourse, this term and the various goals associated with “change” are important aspects of Richmond’s identity.

At the ROC, change is one of the central terms that the church uses to identify itself. Among congregants who actively pursue the changes Aguilar promotes, there appears to be consensus that the city must change. Yet, despite the persuasiveness of Aguilar’s rhetoric of change there is uncertainty about what exactly he wants to change—the system that causes the unequal distribution of resources, or the symptoms of poverty. As McGee writes, the ideograph analysis may be helpful in locating tensions between “*any* ‘given’ human environment (“objective reality”) and any ‘projected’ environment (“symbolic” or “social reality”) latent in rhetorical discourse” (16). By studying the ideograph “change” in the discursive practices at the ROC, we may be able to articulate

those tensions between the material or structural change that Richmond needs and the spiritual change Aguilar promotes. Regardless of his true motives, Aguilar provides a fascinating example of an untrained rhetorician who is deftly handling problems of convening an audience of disparate people, articulating a vision and getting this audience to buy into his vision—one in which they might see themselves as agents of change.

Literature Review

Rhetorical Success and the Problem of Audience

As Aristotle wrote, rhetoric is the “faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion,” these means of persuasion being ethos, pathos, and logos (181-82). For Aristotle, ethos referred to the ethical appeal and relied on the speaker’s authority or credibility, pathos referred to the to the emotional appeal and logos referred to logical appeals made during persuasive speeches. Historically, rhetoric has been thought of as complimentary to other disciplines, particularly politics, as the art of discovery and invention used to determine which course of action best serves the public good. As John Lucaites writes, rhetoric is often considered “an art of practical reason” used “to negotiate the course of communal belief and action where disagreement and chaos would otherwise reign” (247).

Rhetorical discourse is complicated because rhetors must persuade audiences to reach consensus on matters about which there is uncertainty. To understand how a rhetor might do this successfully, scholars have tried to analyze the relationship between the elements of a rhetorical situation, commonly referred to as exigency, audience, or constraints. They also consider the relationships between elements of the rhetorical triangle: message, audience, and communicator (speaker or writer). Models of these relationships are constantly revised to account for new media and technology or in light of social changes. To give a brief overview of how rhetorical theorists understand successful rhetorical moments, we might start with Lloyd Bitzer’s 1968 essay, “The Rhetorical Situation” as well as Richard Vatz’s response. Lloyd Bitzer’s essay focused on how rhetorical situations come to be, and in this essay he theorized the origins of rhetorical discourse

(217-218). Bitzer believes a problematic or uncertain situation is the origin of rhetorical discourse (219-225). In this concept of rhetoric, a rhetor's job is to make a problematic situation known to an audience. While Bitzer's definitions of exigency, audience, and constraints are foundational to subsequent theories of rhetorical situations, his concept of exigencies seems to limit the purview of rhetorical discourse to only those situations that are inherently meaningful.

In his response, titled "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation" Richard Vatz declines to accept that exigencies reside in a situation inherently, but rather that the rhetor chooses to make situations salient to an audience. He sees the speaker as the origin of the rhetorical text and meaning not as something a rhetor discovers, but creates (228). In his concept, rhetoric is not constrained by the situation but is a useful tool for making an event meaningful to an audience. Both Bitzer and Vatz seem to agree that a rhetor will be successful if he or she considers the beliefs, attitudes, and expectations of an audience, if known. In his concept of rhetorical situations, Bitzer calls these *constraints* (222).

Although Bitzer and Vatz admit that the rhetor must be concerned with the attitudes and beliefs of a particular audience, they do not really consider how the audience might be a controlling factor in the rhetorical situation—the rhetor or exigency are the controlling factors. In their concepts of the rhetorical situation, the audience plays a rather passive role. As Bitzer puts it, a rhetorical audience is "capable of being influenced by discourse and can mediate change" (221). It is assumed that the audience is made up of sovereign, rational subjects, ready and waiting to be influenced by discourse. They do not consider how the audience might not be fixed but rather changing.

Although this concept of audience did not manifest strongly in their seminal 1984 article, “Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked: The Role of Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy,” Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede’s work at that time was devoted to the problematic role of the audience. Since then they have continued to explore the problem of audience in essays published in 1996 and 2008. In their 1984 essay, they argued that perhaps a writer/speaker did not exclusively write for a known audience or a fictionalized audience as Walter Ong suggested, but rather both (10-15). The success of a rhetor therefore depends on their ability to consider the constraints of an addressed audience but also the ability to invoke roles for an imagined audience by offering cues to the reader within the text, cues about the role the rhetor hopes readers will assume (12).

Part of the reason Lunsford and Ede revised former models of the rhetorical situation was because they had begun to question whether audiences were actually collectives—as Bitzer and Vatz treated them—with “ample opportunities for interaction” or if they were more often disparate or divided (11-12). In situations where an audience is unknown to the speaker/writer, Lunsford and Ede argue that the rhetor must imagine and invoke a role for the audience. They must “conjure their vision—a vision which they hope readers will actively come to share as they read the text—by using all the resources of language available to them to establish a broad, and ideally coherent, range of cues for the reader” (18). Lunsford and Ede’s model reminds us that the relationship between the audience, text and rhetor is not a uni-directional one, but rather that there is a “diverse range of potential interrelationships in any written discourse” (21).

While Lunsford and Ede demonstrated that the communicative process was more multi-directional than previously thought, it was not until a 1996 critique of their own

work that Lunsford and Ede directly address the problem with conceptions of audience as fixed or homogenous (26-28). They say that because of an emphasis on “success” the rhetorical tradition has tended to exclude those who make efficient communication more difficult, like women or slaves in ancient Greece (34). This emphasis on success has a tendency to deny or hide differences within an audience. They write that what is “most deeply suppressed in the persistent gesture toward success, with its accompanying silent embrace of sameness, is a concomitant inattention to issues of difference” (35). Even in their own work they noticed this tendency. They say this focus on successful communication does not account for the “value that misunderstanding, resistance, or similar “failures” might have in complementing and enriching our notion of “successes” by opening up spaces for additional voices, ways of understanding, conversations, and avenues of communication” (34).

However, despite its flaws and tendency to exclude, Lunsford and Ede believe we can work to make the rhetorical tradition more open and inclusive of additional voices or ways of understanding. To do so we must we attempt to “understand the complex choices, multiple responsibilities, and competing representations that communication always entails” (35). As they demonstrated in another essay twelve years later, we must continuously revise how we understand acts of composing. In their 2008 essay, “Among the Audience: On Audience in the Age of New Literacies” they claim that new media and technology have further complicated the relationship between writer, reader, text, context, and medium (42-45). In their revised model of the rhetorical triangle, the relationships between writer, reader, and text are controlled by the context and the medium of communication (47-51). For example, in online writing situations, people may

simultaneously play the roles of writer and reader or switch between roles, so that the relationship between writer and reader becomes conditioned by the medium. While the effects of new media call into question past models of the rhetorical situation Lunsford and Ede still remain faithful to the rhetorical tradition, in part, it seems because of its incredible flexibility in the face of these changes in context and medium.

Like Lunsford and Ede, Barbara Biesecker also challenges the long-held perspective of audience as unified, preconditioned group of rational subjects. Her essay is a response to Bitzer and Vatz's essays on the rhetorical situation. While they disagree about the relationship between an exigency and the rhetor, Bitzer and Vatz among other theorists treat the audience as a stable audience made up of rational subjects, a concept which Biesecker wishes to challenge (234). Working against the tendency in the rhetorical tradition to exclude difference, Biesecker instead embraces it, applying Jacques Derrida's theme of *différance* to theories of the rhetorical situation. Under this lens, we can see how the audience is unstable and shifting, not fixed; the identity of the audience is constantly being negotiated and meaning constantly being revised (242-244). This view of audience has implications for rhetorical discourse. She writes that "If the subject is shifting and unstable (constituted in and by the play of *différance*) then the rhetorical event may be seen as an incident that produces and reproduces the identities of subjects and constructs and reconstructs linkages between them" (243). The theme of *différance* allows us to see that every time there is discursive practice, it is producing new identities for the audience. As Biesecker puts it, rhetorical situations then become events "structured not by logic of influence but by a logic of articulation" (242). If logics of influence are guided by the assumption that members of an audience can be influenced by a message so that they act

to resolve an exigency—as the rhetorical audience does in Bitzer’s model—logics of articulation instead say that an audience must first be convened before they can act. And to do so, one must articulate individual needs and link them to the collective interests of a social group or movement. Under a logic that says an audience must be constructed or invoked, discursive practices such as preaching sermons or writing weekly devotionals become, as Biesecker puts it, occurrences on a “trajectory of becoming rather than Being” (243). Speech events or acts of writing thus provide cues to the reader or listener as to whom they might become as they interact with that text. We also find logics of articulation in social movements where the goal is to link the material or ideological concerns of individuals with the interests of some larger movement for social change. In this process, individuals may come to re-imagine themselves and their role in the larger movement.

Gerald Hauser and Susan Whalen provide a helpful explanation for how logics of articulation guide rhetorical discourse within New Social Movements (115-40). NSMs, in contrast to protest movements in the 1960s, are typically not associated with materialist issues such as racism or economic wellbeing but are rather linked to “interpretations of material conditions” like gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religious faith and practice, legal status, social role, etc. (132). Following Biesecker, Whalen and Hauser suggest New Social Movements require a rhetoric that is governed by logics of articulation rather than influence. They have observed that the rhetoric of NSMs is guided by a concept of the subject as constituted through discourse (123). The rhetoric of NSMs thus aims to articulate a coherent expression of interests that will bring together individuals and shape them into some collective being. As Hauser and Whalen write, “the interests articulated

through the rhetoric of these movements must offer some whole explanation, some lens, through which the private and personal needs of the individual may be essentialized and acted upon” (128). Since individuals may be disconnected from other individuals in movement activity, the rhetoric used by leaders of these movements must strongly tie together personal meaning, collective behavior, and a vision of the public good (129).

Rather than simply just persuade or influence an audience, in the postmodern context a rhetor must also bring to the rhetorical event a vision for how he or she wants the audience to respond and present roles or identities they hope their audience will assume. By providing cues to their audience, they can invoke these roles. Such a concept of the rhetorical situation reinforces what Lunsford and Ede suggested in their essay on AA/AI, about meaning not being inherent in the situation or text. No longer is an audience fixed and waiting to be motivated by discourse as it was in Bitzer and Vatz’s models. Rather, the audience, speaker and text interact in such a way to create meaning and to negotiate the action of a collective group. A successful rhetor who wants to motivate social action will navigate these interrelated elements of the rhetorical situation and articulate roles and identities for movement members.

Rhetoric and Religion: Charisma, ethos, and logics of articulation

As the literature on rhetorical situations demonstrates, success as a social movement leader requires using some of the same strategies that a successful rhetor would use. Likewise, the ability of a religious leader to convene a congregation also depends on his or her ability to apply the rhetorical principles of ethos and kairos, and perhaps to articulate the roles and identities of their audience during speech events. Sometimes, the religious leader’s ability to lead a congregation or motivate an audience is derived from

their possession of charisma. In the *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Max Weber traces the concept of charisma, or the ‘gift of grace’ to the vocabulary of early Christianity. Weber has noticed that those leaders who possess charisma are often in a position of authority that rests on “devotion to the specific and exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person” (328). The legitimacy of a charismatic leader comes from their followers’ “complete personal devotion to the possessor of the quality, arising out of enthusiasm, or of despair and hope” (359). Since charismatic leaders derive their influence from the devotion of their followers, the audience plays an important role in whether or not the speaker is successful.

In his book *Charisma and Christian Persuasion*, Craig Smith traces the word charisma back to the Greek word karism. Karism, which means grace or favor, is a cousin of Kairos, which Gorgias defined as “fitting timing or appropriateness of speech.” Later, the New Testament writers talked about kairos as “God’s time” or as a time “when ‘an individual undergoes the change...necessary for a new understanding of Being’”(3). Unlike chronos, which is thought of as a linear, structured, or measured time, kairos refers to the time when one seizes an opportunity. John E. Smith describes the difference by thinking of chronos as quantitative time and kairos as qualitative time (“Time and Qualitative Time” 49).

Establishing ethos is important for religious leaders as well as rhetors. For example the conversion experience of Christians is important for establishing the authority of a religious leader or to help leaders identify with followers. As Craig Smith writes in his chapter on ethos, the conversion experience was essential to Paul’s authenticity as a charismatic leader. Paul often retold stories of his persecution or his conversion

experience to gain authority to speak about the Lord, Smith says. Smith suggests that identification is important to charisma, following Kenneth Burke's ideas on how people externalize and project their egos as they try to identify with others. Substantial identification Smith says is when a speaker shares something material with their audience, like the body of Christ, the sacraments, or a common liturgy (95).

Another example of how religious leaders construct ethos or encourage communal identification is found in Beverly Moss's book *A Community Text Arises*, about the literacy practices of African-American churches. Moss analyzes the rhetorical strategies preachers use to cultivate strong communal identity. African-American preachers in her study use the literacy events surrounding the delivery of sermons as a space for a discursive practice of what she calls intertextuality – a dialogue between speaker and audience and between oral and written texts. What enabled this discursive practice was the ministers' ability to connect with their congregations, to construct their own identities as leaders but also as members of the group (60-65). One of the strategies ministers use to identify with their parishioners is to use first-person plural pronouns: we, us, our. They also may speak in a local dialect, or call on shared knowledge outside the Bible, referencing folk stories, local legends, or popular culture. As Moss learned, even when a minister does not actually identify with the group, he may code switch or act and talk about the way he used to be so that his congregation does not think he has forgotten where he came from. Moss concluded that during these speech events, "ministers and congregation constantly negotiate new community identities" (65).

Moss's observations of African-American preachers and Smith's analysis of the way Christian leaders build ethos indicate that discursive practices in religious settings

may be governed by what Biesecker calls a logic of articulation. Moss noticed that preachers were concerned with identification between himself and individual parishioners as well as with the congregation's identity as a whole. In both the contemporary and Biblical example, communicative acts between religious leaders and congregants were motivated by a need to convene people and encourage them to adopt a particular set of beliefs or worldview. These activities attest to the importance of identification between the speaker and audience but also between audience members; without a collective identity and common purpose a social movement or religious organization risks losing relevance to its members and efficacy within the public realm.

Aguilar is a religious leader focused on social change who does some of the things which a successful rhetor is said to do—*convene* an audience by establishing ethos and using elements of the rhetorical culture that appeal to a particular group, *articulate* individual identities and help members negotiate collective interests through discourse, and *envision* how this audience and their society can change. As I described earlier, there is some tension in Aguilar's rhetoric, particularly when it comes to articulating exactly what about society needs to change. Ideological contradictions exist within all of us; they certainly seem to exist within the collective consciousness of Richmond. This may be because Aguilar addresses social injustices that are rooted in a socio-economic system that is difficult to challenge or change. Considering some of the literature on religion as a political resource may help explain the ideological tension in Aguilar's rhetoric and his complicated relationship to power and control in society.

Gramsci on Religion, Politics, and Ideology

Just as rhetoric can serve politics as a means of persuasion or a way to articulate

group identities and belief systems, religion can too. It can also serve as a political force, according to Antonio Gramsci's sociology of religion and theories on power and control in society. In 1987, John Fulton provided one of the first English analyses of Antonio Gramsci's sociology of religion in which he suggests that to Gramsci religion is always political and in direct relationship with socialism and revolutionary forces (198). Gramsci believed political control required both coercion and consent, achieved through institutions like the church. As Fulton writes, "for Gramsci, the Western Capitalist democracy consists, yes, of a *state* which has near monopoly of coercion (police, armed forces); but just as important as the coercive power of the state is the cultural power of *civil society*, which combines democracy and capitalism to produce a force for social control of extraordinary resilience" (198-99). This cultural power for social control is what Gramsci understood as hegemony, according to Fulton (199). Fulton writes,

Gramsci conceives of medieval hegemony as both social structural (one historical bloc, the dominant component being that of the alliance between aristocracy and church) and cultural (the dominant group interpreting cultural and religious beliefs in such a way as to retain their hegemonic role, and the subaltern groups equally interpreting life in such a way as to accept the role of the dominant groups). (209)

For Gramsci, "civil society and the state are structures, amalgams of institutions, beliefs and practices which mediate the power and control of the dominant classes or groups to the members of the state as a whole" (204). These structures insure that the subordinate classes are not exploited; however these structures at the same time do not interfere with modes of production (204). In Gramsci's explanation, while the state was responsible for coercion, other institutions like the church and the schools were the social forces

responsible for encouraging consent to the status quo. Religion is one of those social forces that can be a “considerable hegemonic force” according to Fulton (199).

In his article, “Religion as Political Resource: Culture or Ideology?” Rhys H. Williams provides further explanation of how religion works as a political resource, by distinguishing between religion as culture and religion as ideology. A view of religion as culture assumes that religion is implicit in culture; religious interpretations of the world become embedded in culture and society and can eventually influence the political system (368-371). For example, Williams says that the “subcultural values” of inclusion in evangelical traditions have been linked to changes in the American political concept of citizenship (369). About religion-as-culture, Williams writes: “Religion influences political relationships because religion is central in the creation of symbolic worlds...its influence is often effective without active awareness of it” (370). The religion-as-culture approach does have a “sense-making component” Williams says but it emphasizes the “affective and identity-oriented functions” and is less focused on beliefs than on “meaning in the world” (370).

Williams concludes that religion is a political resource because it is culture, but also because it is ideology. A view of religion as ideology refers to the more conscious, organizational aspects of religion like doctrine or theology which he says “can offer coherent and elaborated cognitive rationales that diagnose social problems, prescribe possible solutions, and justify the movement’s actions—often in the cause of universal verities” (377). Thus, religion can contain the direct ideological tools for social and political change or provide an implicit cultural worldview that may indirectly lead to

social change. Alternatively, religion can contain the ideological tools or implicit worldviews that lead to an acceptance of the status quo.

Historically, Christianity has often provided “direct ideological tools” for social and political change. The social gospel, which emerged during the late 19th and early 20th century, was a theology that guided Christians to ameliorate evil conditions but also to “remove the causes of social injustice and evils” (416). While Christianity should avoid revolutionary tactics, “it must be interested in social reconstruction” according to this definition of the social gospel (416). In America the social gospel has convened Christians of various denominations to take action on social injustices such as poverty, child labor, suffrage and the right to organize (416). During the Civil Rights era, the Black Church was largely responsible for leading the fight against political and economic injustices faced by African-Americans sometimes in an organized and coherent way that reflects Williams’ idea of religion-as-ideology.

In other instances, such as the increased political involvement of the Christian Right in late 20th century America, religion takes on a more discursive role in the process of social change. In Mark Rozell’s essay “The Christian Right: Evolution, Expansion, Contraction” published in *A Public Faith*, he discusses how The Christian Right has become particularly adept in recent years at influencing culture and politics. For example, evangelical Christians have learned through recent public-policy debates on issues such as same-sex marriage or home schooling that theological arguments must be traded out for appeals to general civic principles such as family values or individualism. This is a better way of ensuring their arguments will stand up in a public debate (31-32). Thus, religion takes on the role of influencing society or politics at the subcultural level,

through an emphasis on certain values that may eventually “get translated into features (either values or institutions) of the political system” (Williams 370).

The church’s intervention in social and political matters can become very complicated, particularly when members or leaders of the church have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. For these reasons, sometimes the Christian church chooses to stay out of matters of social and political reform. Or, as Gramsci noted, Christianity can be quite passive in the face of social injustice. This is in part because of what Gramsci saw as a theological emphasis in early Christianity on individual sin along with a fatalistic view of humanity or confidence in the power of resurrection that kept Christians resigned to “accept adversity as well as prosperity” in much the same way (Fulton 208).

As Manning Marable argues in his chapter “The Ambiguous Politics of the Black Church” in *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, since the 1960s the Black Church has failed to adequately fight political and economic injustices (201). Many Black clergy tacitly support capitalism despite its history of enslaving and disenfranchising black people, according to Marable (210-11). Instead of supporting capitalism, he says the Black Church must “preserve and defend the actual material interests of one’s congregation, and by extension, all Black people, by confronting the state apparatus, by taking calculated political risks, and by articulating the real grievances of Blacks from pulpits to public policy meetings” (213). Following Gramsci, Marable insists the Black ministers must try to conceive of humanity in terms of what it can become, rather than what it seems to be—individuals limited by sin (214). This shift, he says, would enable African-American clergy to focus less on the individual salvation of one person and more on the collective needs of humanity (214). Thus the Black Church

might regain some of the efficacy it had during The Civil Rights era in fighting for economic and political reforms that protect the material interests of African-Americans.

Another example of the ambivalence of the church toward social issues is found in accounts of the Church's response to apartheid in South Africa. During this time, a number of theologians spoke out against the Christian Church's position toward apartheid, convening to produce a statement called the *Kairos Document*, which called on leaders of the Christian Church to examine their relationship to the state and to the mediation of power by a dominating class. They urged clergy to reject any alliance between the Church and State and to speak out openly against the regime responsible for the deaths of thousands of black Africans, many of whom were Christians. According to the authors, South African clergy tended to make appeals for justice only to the socially and economically powerful within their congregations or communities (28-30). The authors of the *Kairos Document* criticized the church for failing to admit that real change had to come from the bottom up. They insisted South African church leaders had a responsibility as Christians to confront the evil political regime and promote revolutionary change at the level of their own congregations and communities—not from the 'top' down (28-30).

The methods of analysis used in the *Kairos Document* informs my study of the ideograph "change" in discourse about Richmond and in Aguilar's texts. To demonstrate how the Church was failing to address this social crisis, the authors of the *Kairos Document* studied the terms "justice" "reconciliation" and "non-violence" in the sermons of South African clergy (25-36). Their study revealed the range of acceptable beliefs and behaviors about these terms within the sermons they studied. They also revealed the

theological assumptions from which the totalitarian regime was deriving its power. By studying the use of these terms in relationship to the material conditions or consequences of justice, reconciliation and non-violence, they concluded that promoting non-violence as a solution to the crisis rather than confronting the crisis, meant South African clergy were giving tacit support to the growing militarization of the apartheid regime (33).

Studying Aguilar's texts for usage of the term "change" reveals the range of acceptable beliefs and behaviors about change that he promotes to his audience. In other words, his texts provide clues as to what is an acceptable level of change in society. His texts also establish the belief that both the powerless and powerful are responsible for creating change. One of the distinguishing factors about Aguilar's message is his inclusion of poor people in efforts to change the city and his insistence that poor people are capable of creating change, because they are poor. In order to persuade an audience of mostly poor people that they can be agents of change, Aguilar follows what Biesecker would call logics of articulation, that is, he conceptualizes his audience as people who may be poor now but are on the way to becoming someone new, changed by Jesus Christ. Thus, he links identities rooted in material conditions with identities formed by spiritual conditions, and argues that spiritual change can lead to material change. He also links the ideological interests of born-again Christians with the material needs of poor people.

Aguilar's direct confrontation of the plight of the poor in his sermons seems to be a sign that religion functions as ideology at the ROC—he does provide a coherent vision for alleviating the symptoms of poverty. Yet Aguilar tends to rely more on the affective and identity-oriented qualities of religion, more than on beliefs or doctrine, and so religion also seems to function as culture at the ROC. This may be one of the reasons it

appears to be successful as a political resource. Aguilar's rhetoric of change might sound revolutionary, like the challenges to the apartheid state promoted by the author's of the *Kairos Document*, but it really is not. While Aguilar takes a 'bottom up' approach and includes poor people in his vision of changing the city, he does not challenge the control of power or wealth directly. Instead Aguilar repoliticizes social issues, making poverty and its symptoms matters of personal responsibility that his congregants can and should act to resolve.

As he writes about change, Aguilar reveals some ambivalence about political change and the church's role in society, which leads to conflicting messages about which aspects of society and culture to uphold and which to reject. Even though Aguilar does not make a structural critique nor call for revolution, he does convene and mobilize a group of more than two thousand people who are set on changing Richmond by redistributing resources. At the same time, he is friendly enough with the political establishment, as evidenced by the Governor's speech at the Big House. And so Aguilar oscillates between accepting and challenging the political and cultural status quo in Richmond.

Religion, class experiences, and consent

The way Aguilar relates to power and control in society may be shaped by his own experiences growing up poor. His life experiences and the urban population to which he ministers also influence Aguilar's theology. According to John Fulton, Gramsci noticed that people of different social classes experience religion differently. He says Gramsci uses five terms to explain the relationship between historical religions and social structure—folklore, religion of the people, the common sense, religion of the

intellectuals, and philosophy. According to Fulton, the religion of the people is the “beliefs, morals, and practices which express in a religious way the needs and experiences of various groups of people, such as the subaltern or dependent classes: workers, peasants, as well as middle class groups” (203). The religion of the people is a fragmented, incoherent set of beliefs and usually provides a religious explanation for those things immediately experienced in nature or through human relationships (203). It is fragmented, because it tends to develop spontaneously, in response to lived experience. It is guided by common sense, which is context-dependent and linked to the philosophy, class, and history of a particular group. The religion of the people does not exist above the people nor rely on abstract universal truths. Rather, it provides an obviously moral or obviously truthful explanation of human experience as it occurs. We might think of the religion of the intellectuals as operating in *chronos* time, which is measured and structured and the religion of the people as operating in *kairos* time, which is spontaneous and responsive to the moment.

The religion of the intellectuals provides a more organized and detailed explanation of the world because it does not rely on common sense but rather on dogma or theology. It provides a highly detailed explanation of the world and has become so detailed and organized because of its long history as a socially hegemonic force. Those who experience the religion of the intellectuals, typically come from the class of what Gramsci called the “organic intellectuals,” who work to maintain and organize hegemonic values in society or coercion from the state (204-211). This class included the judges, civil servants, politicians, teachers, clergy, and philosophers (204). Rhys Williams writes that Gramsci’s distinction between the religion of the people and the religion of the

intellectuals is less about who “holds the religious values” and more about “the relative degree of intellectual coherence and the relation to immediate experience and lived culture” between these two types of religious experiences (373).

Despite the perception of cultural hegemony as the will of an elite minority imposed manipulatively on a subordinated majority, cultural theorist Jackson Lears says Gramsci did not view cultural hegemony this way, but rather as a process that required the consent of a subordinated social group. Celeste Condit and John Lucaites agree with Lears, saying that a dominant ideology—which is a means of maintaining cultural hegemony—does not exist but rather competing ideologies exist (xv-xiv). If a dominant ideology emerges, it is negotiated through public argumentation, a rhetorical process in which “various organized and articulate interest groups negotiate the problems of resource distribution in the collective life of the community” (xv).

Gramsci called emerging social formations and systems of belief an ideological or historical bloc. He noticed they cut across ownership or non-ownership lines and were more often bound by ideology or religious or economic ties (571). According to Lears, a successful ideological bloc will coordinate the ideological to the economic. Leaders of these social groups “must be able to develop a world view that appeals to a wide range of other groups in society and must be able to claim with some plausibility that their particular interests are those of society at large” (571). Aguilar, for example, links the ideological concerns of his congregants—that is, their desire to become born-again Christians and live a Christian lifestyle—with their own economic wellbeing and the economic wellbeing of Richmond, insisting that one change will bring about the other. Aguilar has developed a worldview that focuses on spiritual or ideological change before

material change. He, as Mcgee might say, has developed a materialist rhetoric, one that tries to explain some of the tensions between the ideological and the real.

Emerging social formations like Aguilar's church may encounter ideological tenets of the dominant culture that conflict with their conceptions of the world or with the material aspects that condition their lives. These formations must then decide to accept some values of the dominant culture while also developing their own system of beliefs and practices that explain their daily lives and experiences. Gramsci called this process of consent "contradictory consciousness," a mental state "mixing approbation and apathy, resistance and resignation" (570). This term explains why members of the working class might have adopted an ideology and worked to maintain it, even though it legitimated their subordination and the dominance of another cultural group (574-579). While ideologies and ideographs that social groups follow do not have to be real, they can be powerfully truthful and conditioning to the people who adopt and legitimize them.

Aguilar and his growing congregation are an emerging social formation or an ideological bloc, bound by ideology and religion but also by material and economic conditions. At least in his rhetorical construction of them, Aguilar's audience includes poor people, members of the working class, the lower middle class, and some wealthy members of the upper middle class. Based on his sermons and other texts, he and his congregation accept some values, beliefs, and practices of American culture and society—particularly middle class culture—while rejecting others that do not align with their lives and experiences. Aguilar seems to display a contradictory consciousness in his articulation of the values he wants his audience to uphold and enact and those he says they should reject. He also seems to hold contradictory allegiances to social justice and to

the system that creates injustices. But any ambivalence he feels about change is masked by his rhetoric—which projects a very clear vision for what must change, how it must change, and who is responsible for change. And his speech events and texts consistently articulate the ideology he hopes his audience will adopt and how this belief system relates to the material concerns of the inner city.

Creating an Oppositional Stance

One of the central objectives in Aguilar's texts seems to be to establish that his church, his congregation, and their approach to change, is alternative to the norm. Aguilar produces a challenging ideology by taking an oppositional stance to the traditional church, creating an alternative appearance and style for his church and rejecting aspects of the megachurch movement with which he is grouped, at least sociologically. To demonstrate how Aguilar differentiates himself from other religious groups, I have done a brief comparison of the ROC's theology to the Southern Baptist Convention's theology. I have also provided a brief history of the seeker driven approach to church marketing used by megachurches—which Aguilar explicitly rejects in his book *Soulwinning is Not a Gift*. Lastly, I have compared the ROC to two other churches in Richmond to highlight how Aguilar and his church have an urban aesthetic that other similar churches do not.

To begin, I have classified the ROC according to its marketing practices. To do so, I have borrowed the taxonomy used in a survey of church marketing strategies in 247 Southern Baptist churches done by Robert Vokurka and Stephen McDaniel and published in the *Review of Religious Research* in 2004. This survey considered different churches and their program emphases, marketing communication methods, type of location, and church growth. The churches fell into one of three categories: “traditional,” “program oriented,” and “worship-oriented” (132). I would consider the ROC a “program oriented” church because their web site, which is their primary marketing tool, emphasizes the 150 different programs the church offers. The range of programs they offer for young people and the poor is one of their main marketing strategies. They also market their worship services, which they call a “Party for Jesus!” by using large banner

ads on their website each week, however their programs and services receive the most space on their website (richmondoutreachcenter.com).

Based on what is advertised on their website, the ROC is theologically a lot like Southern Baptists. According to the web site for the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), which is the largest Protestant denomination and the largest Baptist denomination in the United States, most Southern Baptists believe that the Holy Bible was “divinely inspired” and was revealed by God to man (“Basic Beliefs” 1). Man is created in the image of God, but because man sinned against God he “brought sin into the human race” (“Basic Beliefs” 1). However, Southern Baptists, like most Christians, believe man can be redeemed through salvation, which “includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification” (“Basic Beliefs” 1). In terms of missions and evangelism, the SBC believes that it is the “duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations...to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ” (“Basic Beliefs” 1). The church, according to the SBC, is “an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel.” The church seeks to spread the gospel around the world. Its efforts to do so are led by pastors and deacons and while the SBC says that men and women are “gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture” (“Basic Beliefs” 1).

The ROC professes to a belief in the scriptures as the “verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible” which basically means that the scriptures are complete and not limited in any respect (“Statement of Faith” 1). Like the Southern Baptists, the ROC believes in the

hope of salvation through Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God. The ROC also claims that man was created to be like God but “fell through sin, bringing not only physical death but also spiritual death. Now humanity is “totally depraved, having inherited a sinful nature; is bent toward sinning; and has become sinful in thought, word, and deed (“Statement of Faith” 1). Because man is sinful and lost, he must be born again in order to enter the Kingdom of God (“Statement of Faith” 1). The church, according to the ROC’s Statement of Belief is “a group of believers baptized by water; banded together for edification, exhortation, and evangelism as commanded by Christ in the Great Commission; preaching the Gospel to every creature (“Statement of Faith” 1).

One of the most notable differences between the statements of faith for the SBC and the ROC is the language used to describe the sinful or lost. The ROC’s language does not refrain from emphasizing that man is “totally depraved” in a way that seems to say man is irredeemable. The SBC statement uses more tempered language, saying that even though man has sinned, he is sacred and that every person “possesses dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love” (“Basic Beliefs” 1). This difference is a sign that both groups have made deliberate decisions to invoke particular roles for their audience. The ROC serves people who struggle with some of the problems both the Bible and society have deemed negative—drugs, alcohol, violence, abuse, anger, perhaps incarceration for crimes. In their statement on faith they seem to emphasize the completely sinful nature of humanity. Although it is unknown who the SBC’s audience is, their statement on sin seems to invoke an audience that is sinful but also thinks of themselves as special and redeemable people because they are created in the image of God.

Even though they are theologically a lot like Southern Baptists, the ROC is institutionally very different. For one, it enjoys the freedom of not being formally tied to a denomination and not having the word “church” or “Baptist” in their title. In fact, the ROC originally started as an outreach operation, not as a church. According to a 2001 interview with the Richmond-based *Style Weekly Magazine*, Aguilar says several evangelical and Pentecostal congregations who wanted to start an inner city outreach program called him to Richmond (Singh 1).

Perhaps because of their original programming, the ROC is technically registered with the IRS as a 501 (c) 3 public charity with a religious or educational focus, rather than a church. According to the Internal Revenue Service’s “Tax Guide for Churches and Religious Organizations,” churches (all places of worship not exclusively Christian churches) that meet the IRS criteria are automatically granted tax-exempt status (5). These criteria demand that “the organization must be organized and operated exclusively for religious, educational, scientific, or other charitable purposes” and it must refrain from any lobbying, cannot have private stakeholders, and cannot intervene in political campaigns (5). Churches and religious organizations can go ahead and apply for IRS tax-exemption even if they already have been granted it just to ensure their tax-exempt status is known to the public (5). The ROC has applied for tax-exempt status and is listed as a public charity with a religious or educational focus, rather than as a church. Today the ROC offers worship services, Bible study for adults, a Children’s ministry and conducts baptisms. The church now offers more of the programming traditionally associated with churches and religious organizations, but their status remains as a public charity.

Outwardly, the ROC does not look like a brick and steeple church. Inside, there are no pews, no organ, no steeple, no crosses, or baptismal fonts, no congregants in suits, ties, and dresses. In the place of these traditional symbols of church there are symbols of popular culture: a church housed in a basketball gym, walls decorated with graffiti art, music by a rap and rock band. Congregants at the ROC dress casually, often wearing jeans and leather biker vests, screen-printed t-shirts made at the ROC's screen-printing shop, or items from the ROC's Jesus Couture clothing line for women. Aguilar embraces his church's unusual history and the fact that they are not technically a church comes up a lot in his sermons as well as the church's marketing on their web site. For example, on the ROC's old website, a disclaimer read: "Warning! This site might be hazardous to your traditions!" On the page advertising their worship services, was another disclaimer: "You ain't never seen church like this!" (richmondoutreachcenter.com).

Institutionally, the ROC has more in common with other megachurches than traditional Southern Baptist churches. Many megachurches are also non-denominational, and embrace non-traditional architecture as well as program and worship-oriented marketing strategies. In their book *Meetinghouse to Megachurch*, Anne Loveland and Otis Wheeler describe the material and cultural history of the church building in America (114-179). In their observations of the megachurch movement since the 1960s, they explain that church leaders were concerned with a decline in church membership and identified the problem as one of purpose and appeal. The church, they said, lacked cultural relevance. The "remedy" for the ailing Christian church was to adopt a "marketing orientation" one that viewed the church worshiper as a "consumer." This model worked because innovators knew American consumers would shop around until

they found the church that suited their tastes (118). This turn toward a consumer-based model for religion is also examined in the book *Shopping for God*, by James Twitchell. He explains that the “spiritual marketplace” in the United States is busier than in comparable countries in Western Europe because Americans have more success at making religion into a product that can be sold (2). According to Twitchell, this has a lot to do with the country’s history and a free-market economy that treats religion as an enterprise, rather than an institution (20).

Loveland and Wheeler trace the embrace of popular culture within church architecture to the 1950s when many evangelical churches started to break free from traditional notions of church, often out of necessity (120). For example, when Robert H. Schuller was looking for venues to start a church in California in the 1950s, the only available option was a drive-in movie theater. This became the site for Garden Grove Church (now Crystal Cathedral congregation), considered one of the earliest megachurches (121). Bill Hybel, a protégée of Schuller, founded Willow Creek Church in Chicago in 1975, and Rick Warren established Saddleback Church in Southern California in 1979. Today, Hybel and Warren, along with Joel Osteen are some of the most well known megachurch leaders. They run churches that offer multiple services on multiple campuses, use contemporary music and high-tech performances during worship services that take place in buildings that look more like performing arts centers or community colleges than churches. Hybel and Warren, among others, have even started parachurch organizations for generating publications, resources, and workshops to educate church professionals on the seeker-approach to church growth (willowcreek.org and saddleback.com).

Despite its popularity, seeker-sensitive church marketing has received a fair amount of backlash from Christians and non-Christians alike. Some have argued that this model for church growth is responsible for the abandonment of the city by the evangelical church. In his essay on the dangers of the church growth movement, Ralph Elliot explains that Peter Wagner, who led the Church Growth Movement for many years, proposes a dangerous model for church growth, one that risks “dooming the city to hopelessness” (par. 15). Elliot writes that the church chooses “target populations according to the criterion of success” and these are typically not those populations in the city “with its economic mobility, its changing neighborhoods and racial mixture.” Instead churches elect to establish themselves in the suburbs and continually expand outward, into “each suburban ring which mobility and economics establish.” As a result, Elliot says: “The biblical concern for the powerless is totally overlooked. The movement also sanctifies the unholy status quo” (par. 15)

Like many contemporary American churches, the ROC too is aware that spiritual seekers tend to “shop around” for a church. In a conversation with a ROC member one night, I heard this exact language employed. She described her six-year process of “shopping” for a church. Finally, she and her husband found the ROC, which appealed to them because it was “casual and so dedicated to service in the community” (“ROC Member”). She indicated that she was attracted to the church’s worship type and their program-orientation. But Aguilar would say that he did not design the worship service or programming in order to attract people like her, but rather to enable soulwinning. In his book, *Soulwinning is Not a Gift*, Aguilar says that these new terms churches are using—“Seeker Friendly” or “Seeker Sensitive”—are not found in the New Testament. “I

personally think both terms are unscriptural!” he writes (43). This is found in his chapter explaining why churches in America don’t win souls, because they spend too much time designing programs and services to attract people to their church, rather than going out into the community and soulwinning. It would seem that the point of Aguilar’s organization is not teaching theology either; it’s soulwinning. “Please don’t email me about how I need to be preaching to Christians and sowing the Word into their lives,” he writes (43). Although he intends to help believers apply the scriptures to their lives, Aguilar insists that the primary purpose of ROC is to save souls—not to develop a theology or make doctrinal statements nor to market the church as a product that seekers will find appealing. The difference between making theological statements and saving souls seems small, but Aguilar’s point seems to be that he is less interested in methods and more interested in results.

Of course he acknowledges that churches use different worship styles in order to attract congregants, but he denies that these methods are the reason why more people are getting saved.

One thing I have noticed about effective ministries is that none of them do it the same way. There are churches with tens of thousands of members that are called "Seeker Sensitive" and people are getting saved. I have been in Fundamental Baptist Churches where they wear suits and ties every day, don't listen to syncopated music, no drums, old hymns to the max and they have over 20,000 people in their church with thousands getting saved every year. I have been in radical ministries like The ROC where we rock out for the Lord, and people are getting saved and lives are being changed. It is not the method, the music, the pastor, or the people. No, the one thing

they all have in common is the power of the Holy Spirit. That is what makes all of them successful. (“Whatever You Call It” par. 7)

Aguilar emphasizes that his church grows for theological reasons, but the style of his church’s architecture, marketing messages on his web site, and his contemporary worship service demonstrate that Aguilar is probably just as concerned with appealing to the needs and preferences of seekers as his counterparts in the megachurch industry—even if he is unwilling to admit it. His aesthetic and the style of his church project an image of the ROC as counter to traditional churches and as comfortable with urban culture in a way that other city churches are not—even those that also serve Richmond’s urban population.

For example, compared to two other Richmond churches that also serve the inner city, the ROC has a very different style and appearance as well as a tendency to focus more on the uplift of the poor than the middle class. New Life Outreach International is a ministry founded in 1979 and led by a Latino preacher and former gang member named Victor Torres (newlife1.org). This church is just several miles away from the ROC, on the Southside of Richmond. St. Paul’s Baptist Church is a large multi-campus African-American church established in 1909 and currently led by Dr. Lance Watson (mysbc.org). Based on their ministry listings, New Life International Outreach and St. Paul’s Baptist offer programs designed to meet the needs of the city’s poor. Both churches target blacks and other minorities: mostly African-Americans at St. Paul’s Baptist, and a mix of Latino and other ethnic groups at New Life. Both reach out to people who struggle with poverty, drug addiction, or broken spirits. They also offer worship services where people can dress casually, bring children, and listen to

contemporary music. New Life even offers Spanish translation during worship. However, Aguilar and the ROC maintain an urban aesthetic that the other two churches do not. This is important because in order for Aguilar to link the ideological and material concerns of people living in the inner city, he must identify with these people first. Adopting and maintaining an urban aesthetic allows him to construct ethos and identify with people living in the inner city. It also allows him to show others that the culture of the city is not at odds with the church, and that the church can and should embrace the streets.

Unlike Aguilar, Torres and Watson seem to have distanced themselves from the street in a way that Aguilar has chosen not to. Torres, like Aguilar, is a former gang member and was once a heroin addicted teen living on the streets of New York City. New Life Church runs rehabilitation homes and ministries to reach out to and support the city's poor. Torres actually still speaks with a hint of a Puerto Rican accent. But aside from his history and his ethnicity, he is fairly indistinguishable from other professional middle-class, middle-aged men. He wears a suit and tie during church; he is active in the nonprofit community and ecumenical faith community in Richmond. He and his wife Carmen are friends with Joel Osteen and recently attended a national evangelism event with him. They appear to take a much less radical approach to worship, programming, and soul-winning than Aguilar and the ROC.

Dr. Lance Watson of St. Paul's Baptist does not have the same street-kid turned minister story that Torres or Aguilar share. Rather, Watson has a doctorate and according to his biography graduated with honors from every institution he attended ("Biography"). Like Torres, he is also a well-respected member of the Richmond community. He was number 41 on *Style Weekly Magazine's* 2008 Power List and has friends in high places:

Reverend Jeremiah Wright and Former Governor Mark Warner have both spoken at his church in recent years. He leads one of the largest and fastest growing congregations in Richmond: their three campuses serve about 12,000 people. He is active in the Virginia Baptist Association and the World Baptist Congress and speaks frequently around Richmond. According to his biography, Dr. Watson leads a “young, progressive and forward-looking congregation for “People on the Grow” (1). His church is substantially larger than the ROC’s, yet based on what is featured on their website, St. Paul’s is involved in fewer outreach ministries that target the inner city poor, children, and youth.

St. Paul’s does offer services like the ROC that target the city’s poor such as a clothing ministry, mentoring and tutoring in the public school system, a food ministry, and counseling services. But they also focus on developing the African-American middle class. Their community development program, called “NIA” focuses on the following areas: community service, financial stewardship, health and well-being, housing and home ownership, small business development, workforce development and youth and family (“NIA Homepage”). St. Paul’s even operates a credit union. According to their web site, the church has plans to build a “City of Possibility,” a master planned community on a 400 acre lot they have purchased. This development will include residential neighborhoods, commercial and retail space, an elementary school and a community life facility. The church seems very interested in supporting Richmond’s African-American middle class both in their spiritual but also material development (“Biography”).

Although New Life International Outreach or St. Paul’s serve a similar population—people living in the city—and offer contemporary worship services, they both operate

fairly traditional churches, founded primarily as a place of worship and set in buildings that architecturally look like churches. They also do not have the same urban aesthetic as the ROC, nor do they emphasize soulwinning and serving the poor to the extent that the ROC does. Lastly, Aguilar has a personal style that seems to reflect urban culture more than either Victor Torres or Dr. Watson—Aguilar rarely wears a suit, has visible tattoos, and sometimes wears leather biker vests. The other men are most often pictured in suits and ties, or dress shirts and khakis.

Compared to the Southern Baptist Convention’s Basic Beliefs, the ROC is not theologically very different but it does emphasize the sinful nature of man more than the SBC. The ROC is similar to megachurches in their awareness of the preferences and needs of the unchurched people they are trying to reach—even if Aguilar rejects the term “seeker-sensitive.” Compared to other Richmond churches, the ROC is institutionally different because it started as an outreach ministry and because Aguilar and the ROC have adopted an urban aesthetic and an alternative stance to traditional church culture that the other two churches and preachers have not.

Rhetorically, Aguilar may be maintaining this aesthetic in response to the constraints of his known audience. He has crafted a persona, or ethos, for himself and his church that fits with the perceived attitudes, beliefs, and preferences of Richmond’s poor, lower middle class, and young people. Crafting this persona is important because it demonstrates Aguilar’s connection to the culture of the inner city and to the material concerns of poor people. These material concerns motivate his rhetoric. Aguilar invokes roles for this audience as people who are sinful and in need of salvation by emphasizing the sinful nature of humanity. For people who believe in the sinful nature of humanity

and feel they need salvation, his church and worship services become attractive options. He presents himself as someone who grew up poor or on the streets, like some of his congregants, and who is now a successful leader of a multi-million dollar ministry. In doing so, Aguilar demonstrates the kind of change he hopes people will make—from sinner to saved and from poor to rich. Promoting this kind of social change is difficult in a community resistant to change and long divided by race and class. Historically, conflicting material interests have been some of the greatest impediments to finding common ground on public matters regarding Richmond. So Aguilar works hard in his sermons and texts to articulate identities for his audience and emphasize ideological concerns such as shared values, interests, or beliefs—so he can convene people across race and class lines and motivate them to implement his vision for changing Richmond.

Aguilar's vision of change for Richmond is not so different from the change sought by political, faith group, or nonprofit leaders. These public leaders seek progress, be it through the amelioration of poverty, reconciliation between racial groups, the development of Richmond's economy, the improvement of schools, and betterment of other social services. But the debate in Richmond over change tends to be overcast by shadows of doubt. There is much uncertainty about whether Richmond has the leadership needed to guide the region through difficult changes and there is uncertainty about the roles individual citizens can play in programs for change. Conversely at the ROC, conversations about change are hopeful, energetic, and confident, backed by the belief that through God, all things are possible. In his texts, Aguilar clearly identifies roles for his audience within his program for changing the city. Since many ROC volunteers interact directly with the people they help and because Aguilar speaks often about the

church's growth and the impact the church has on the city, there is a more positive feeling at the ROC that change and progress are happening in Richmond.

“Change” in Public Discourse about Richmond

Rob Corcoran, National Director of Initiatives of Change, opens his book *Trustbuilding: An Honest Conversation on Race, Reconciliation, and Responsibility* with a scene from a 2003 groundbreaking for the American Civil War Center at the Tredeger Iron Works building in Richmond. Located on the site where slaves produced thousands of Confederate cannons during the Civil War, the Tredeger building, along with dozens of other sites around the city, have become places where Corcoran says Richmond’s “traumatic racial history” have been publicly acknowledged by both whites and blacks (3-8).

As Corcoran writes, this traumatic racial history is arguably one of the longest in America: Richmond was home to a large interregional slave trade (57-58), it was the Capital of the Confederacy and was the seat of Massive Resistance, a statewide movement to resist the integration of public schools (3). By the time the Supreme Court intervened in the early 1960s to overturn Virginia’s discriminatory laws passed following the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case, many white families had placed their children in private schools or moved to surrounding counties (148-49). A series of political and economic decisions since then have created huge disparities in wealth between the predominantly African-American inner city and white middle class suburbs in Richmond (22-23). As Corcoran writes about Richmond, “Wealth and poverty grew side by side in separate worlds”(3).

Today, those separate worlds still exist. According to data collected by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Richmond’s median household income in 2008 was \$36,968 while in the neighboring county of Henrico it was \$61,300, almost twice as much (“Community

Profiles”). Of the children living in the city, 36% live below the poverty line (“Community Profiles”). Several massive public housing units sit inside the city. In fact, Richmond’s Housing Authority is the largest in the state, and provides housing to nearly 10,000 residents, nearly all black (“Maps and Statistics”). During the 1990s Richmond experienced a peak in crime, likely associated with the crack-cocaine epidemic sweeping many other American cities. According to the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reports Index, in 1985 there were 2,648 counts of violent crime in Richmond. Despite a drop in population, in 1990 this number had risen to 3,230 and by 1995 it was up to 3,500 counts of murder/manslaughter, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault (“Uniform Crime Reports”).

Although Richmond’s crime rates have dropped since the 1990s, many of its residents still live in cyclical poverty, struggle with addiction or mental health issues, spend time incarcerated and have no other choice but to send their children to struggling schools. According to the Richmond Public School’s web site, of the nearly 23,000 Richmond Public Schools students, 19,565 are black. Only 1,874 students are Caucasian and the number of Hispanic students is almost surpassing that. Surrounding counties of Henrico, Hanover, and Chesterfield are still predominantly white, as are their schools, which enjoy higher on-time graduation rates and Standards of Learning Scores than city schools. The on-time graduation rate for city schools in 2008 was 68% whereas in nearby Henrico county it 81.9%, according to data collected by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Despite the damaging effects of economic disparity between the city and counties, some progress has been made to reconcile racial conflict in Richmond through the work of groups such as Hope in the Cities and Richmond Hill—both which facilitate interracial

dialogue and reconciliation programs. During the period from 1993-2003, Corcoran and a network of hundreds of community organizers, faith-group leaders, politicians, and corporate leaders had begun efforts at racial reconciliation through honest conversation between blacks and whites about the wounds caused by their shared history. As a result, Richmond became the first city in the United States to formally acknowledge its past and embark on efforts to heal the region, Corcoran says. Though Richmond's importance on a global stage may be questionable, Corcoran says Richmond's story "matters because real dialogue, real healing, and real partnerships are happening daily in a city most thought could never change" (8).

But some might question the true outcome of racial dialogue and trust building efforts, much like we might question Aguilar's promise of social change. There are those in Richmond who are proud of the progress that has been made to heal emotional wounds caused by racism and ignorance. But those like John Moeser, a professor of Urban Planning at University of Richmond, admit that Hope in the Cities has done much to change people's lives, but says that structurally, Richmond is still much like it was in the 1970s (252). The city needs good leadership, Moeser says. But part of the problem is that "there is no perception of crisis" in Richmond (252). "Those who are not directly impacted by injustice can go about their lives without seeing the threat. Those who are suffering are too busy just trying to survive to do much about it" (252). Perhaps the problem is that metro-Richmond residents, particularly those living in the suburbs, aren't aware of the exigent problems facing the city.

The local news media keeps residents well informed of the crime, violence, drug problems, poor schools, and political infighting that plague the city. But the media does

little to explain which are the most pressing problems in the city or how average citizens might help. In a conversation with Reverend Ben Campbell, the head of the Micah Initiative and Executive Director of Richmond Hill, an ecumenical retreat center in Church Hill, he framed this problem by asking, “Which would you guess the average Richmond resident knows more about: The problems facing people in New Orleans, or the problems facing people in Gilpin Court? And which social cause do you suppose the average Richmond resident is more likely to give money to?” (“Personal Interview”). If awareness is not a problem, sometimes apathy or ambivalence about change is an impediment to resolving social injustices that face the city’s poor.

Former Richmond mayor and Virginia Governor Tim Kaine has written that the region is “congenitally resistance to change of any kind” (Corcoran, ix). Dr. Jim Crupi also observed Richmond’s reluctance to change and uncertainty about what needs to change, in his interviews with 50 business and civic leaders in 1993 and 2007. In his 1993 report, he described regional leaders who had a hard time articulating what Richmond wanted to be and he suggested Richmond was unsure it wanted to be anything other than what it is (“Back to the Future: Richmond at the Crossroads” 6). Therefore the city continues to fail at realizing its assets and reaching its potential because it lacks a clear and compelling vision for the future. According to Crupi there is simply “no compelling picture of the future that gets people excited” (6). He claims the region’s reluctance to change is partially due to cultural conventions that guide Richmond leadership. Crupi says Richmond has a “conservative and genteel way of operating” and social problems have been left unresolved because of this (7). He observed that Richmond is a city where public conversations, discussions and debates are infrequent

and confrontation is seen as possibly counterproductive to problem solving. Instead, leadership prefers the quiet and civil resolution of conflicts (7).

His 2007 report concluded that while progress had been made, the region still lacked a sense of community and a galvanizing vision. In the months following the release of the 2007 Crupi report, Richmond activists and journalists expressed their agreements with Crupi's characterizations of the region—that it lacked vision and could not cultivate a strong sense of community. Michael Paul Williams, African-American *Richmond Times-Dispatch* columnist agreed that the city's problem is a lack of vision and even an opposition to change. He wrote: "the region lacks not only a galvanizing vision, but even an iconic image to rally behind. Our civic slogans could well be "No, We Can't!" or "Change, We Don't Believe In" ("No Vision, no heart, no chance" 1). This from the same man who 14 years before stood in front of a crowd at the Tredegar ceremony and applauded Richmond for progressing because of open and honest dialogues about race. According to Corcoran, Williams told the crowd: "We have witnessed our politicians move from stark division and open rancor toward honest attempts to reach consensus" (4).

Two years after the Crupi report, in a July 2009 post on SaveRichmond.com about controversy over the city's Downtown Master Plan, one of their staff writers said that the story of this development project is "a story about vision, or lack of it. Unfortunately, it is a story about conflict-of-interest and blatant patronage politics. It's a Richmond story" ("It All Comes Down To This"). While the region has come a long way from the racial trauma of the 1960s, even as recently as 2009, Richmond is said to lack a galvanizing vision for the future.

Blogger and community activist, John Sarvay suggested the problem with Richmond is that it does not act like a community, in the sense of a group of individuals with shared interests. Jim Dunn, former head of the Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce told Sarvay that what he learned from the Crupi Report was “the disconnect we still have as a region.” Dunn said that our challenge “if we're going to evolve as a world-class region, is to connect the elements that create a community and move them forward” (“The Crupi Report: Fourth and Long” 1).

What exactly these elements are that create a community is not very clear, but writers who responded to the Crupi report seem to think of community as created around shared interests and a common vision for the future. For example, in a *Richmond Times-Dispatch* article, Williams expressed frustration that Richmond knows what holds the region back is its inability to work together as a community. “What ails us can't be cured by outsiders. We've got to start behaving like a real region -- a community of shared interests -- instead of self-interested parties,” Williams wrote (“No Vision, no heart, no chance” 1). He goes on to say that in 2007, fifteen years after the first Crupi report, there wasn't enough emotional investment in unifying the region. “Greater Richmond's potential remains stunted by a paucity of leadership, imagination and something more disturbing -- the heart and compassion required to make the region whole.” He ends the article on a solemn note: “Until that changes, we'll remain Lesser Richmond” (“No Vision, no heart, no chance” 1).

Part of the problem is a matter of identifying an audience and constructing effective messages that will motivate them to create change. According to Sarvay, the leadership class fails to invite average citizens into public discussion. Sarvay suggests that unifying

the region means more than forming councils to spearhead economic development projects; Richmond leaders need to include other voices in the conversation about the city's future. In a post on his blog, he recognizes that there are people in the region who are not invited to participate in civic conversations. Sarvay writes: "Those on the margins can wait for an invitation, or they can issue their own invitations. Either way, it's time for the conversation to change—and the best way to do that is to invite new people into the conversation, and to ask different questions" ("The Downtown Crupi Master plan report" 1).

Sarvay goes on to talk about people who have agency and those in Richmond who do not. He says leaders should be "recognizing that powerlessness is important" and that "for too long -- even today -- the Richmond region has turned to a handful of politicians and businesspeople to transform the region." Sarvay says that while these people should be partners "in all of our efforts to lift up our community, the citizens of the City of Richmond and the Richmond region are, and always have been, the other side of the equation" ("The Art of Powerlessness" 1). Sarvay suggests that one of Richmond's impediments to change is citizenry that is not mobilized or involved in public conversation. He says that citizenship is at the crux of the debate over making Richmond a stronger city. "At the heart of all of these relationships is the nature of citizenship -- what it means for individuals and organizations within a community to actively hold, believe or support something larger (even slightly larger) than their own interests" ("New Partnership, Same Conversation?").

Sarvay also sits on the Capitol Region Collaborative and says he has noticed disconnect between what is said in private meetings and what is enacted in the public

realm in Richmond. He writes, in several meeting with regional players “there was an active desire to care for the whole thing, and to speak passionately about the city, the region, the school system, the James River, the issue of affordable housing, you name it. But something happens when people move from private conversation into the public space” (“New Partnership, Same Conversation?”). What hampers successful communication about change in this particular rhetorical situation seems to be the inability to effectively articulate exigencies as problems that can be resolved by the general public.

If we just look at the tagline for the ROC and the taglines of the Mayor’s Office, the City Council and School Board, we can see which envision roles for average citizens in the project of changing the city and which do not. The ROC’s tagline is “Changing Lives and Creating Life Changers” a phrase that tells what this church does and what role the congregants of this church are called to play—the life changer.

Mayor Dwight C. Jones’s campaign slogan is “Building a Better Richmond.” In his 2010 State of the City speech, he explains that to “Build a Better Richmond we need to improve upon our past successes, and look to the future with a renewed sense of vision and optimism” (“2010 State of the City”). In order to become a great city, “all we need to do is seize the opportunity,” he writes in his closing statement. While he uses collective pronouns, like the preachers in Moss’s study of African-American churches, Jones does not explicitly state to whom “we” refers and what roles “we” might play in this plan to become a great city. Neither does he speak directly to the audience using “you statements” but rather speaks about change and progress happening at the hands of publicly elected officials or imagined audiences which he describes ambiguously. The

Mayor lays out a plan economic growth and community development, investment in youth and regional cooperation, but he does not talk about how individual Richmond residents will participate in these plans. In other speeches, the Mayor has proposed a Neighbor-to-Neighbor Initiative, which focuses on volunteerism and calls for individuals to care for one another. However, the public texts generated on this program do not clearly articulate how and why people should become involved with Neighbor-to-Neighbor as opposed to another volunteer initiative, for example.

Dr. Yvonne Brandon, Superintendent for Richmond Public Schools has adopted a tag line for the school system that also does not articulate a role for the broader Richmond community in improving the city schools—even though hundreds of volunteers are involved in supporting the beleaguered school system. It is “Illuminating the Path from Competence to Excellence” and her goals for the school system are achievement, action, and accountability (“Back to School Message”). It is not clear in her tagline or her web posts who are achieving, who is taking action, and who is being held accountable. Likewise, the city council’s goal is to make Richmond a “vibrant community that is a great place to live, work, learn, play, and raise a family” but they do not articulate how the average citizen might be involved in helping Richmond cultivate these positive qualities (“Vision”).

In political discourse generated by Richmond city leaders the ideograph “change” represents arguments for political or economic reform. In responses generated by journalists and activists “change” represents arguments for structural change and also changes in the nature of public discourse itself—making it more inclusive of alternative viewpoints and average citizens. Structural changes of the sort promoted in the speeches

and web sites of the Mayor, School Superintendent and City Council seem like the sort average citizens may be powerless to facilitate.

On the other hand, community activists in the city who focus on racial reconciliation rather than political reform as a means of change seem to be more hopeful about Richmond's progress over the past twenty years. This is likely because they define and measure change differently. Rob Corcoran, Director of Initiatives of Change, in his book *Trustbuilding: An Honest Conversation on Race, Reconciliation, and Responsibility*, recounts what one veteran of the civil rights movement told him about the change that communities like Richmond need to pursue. She said: "We spent so much effort in changing structures, but we had to keep going back and doing it again because we did not change the hearts of people" (27). Some activists in the city have challenged the idea that "change" means institutional reform and instead have started to present change as a process of trust building between members of a divided community. For example, Rob Corcoran's network, Hope in the Cities, continues efforts at racial reconciliation guided by four key principles: a core group must model "the change and the new relationships that are needed in the wider community;" efforts must be inclusive, they must "hold up a vision for what the community can become" and they must "recognize that real change occurs when the hearts of individuals are changed" (76).

In Aguilar's texts, the ideograph "change" represents arguments for change within the hearts of people. As presented in his writings and sermons, change typically does not refer to the structural reform that politicians or community activists seek. It is aligned with the less quantifiable kind of change that happens within and between people. Like Corcoran and others involved in racial reconciliation efforts in Richmond, Aguilar

emphasizes inclusiveness and relationship building as the means of creating social change. He is aware that this requires a process of finding common ground for a group of people who are unlike in terms of racial and economic conditions. So, in nearly every sermon and text Aguilar acknowledges who his addressed audience is—the poor, wealthy, addicted, homeless, broken-hearted, sinful—but also articulates collective identities or roles for who they will become: “life changers” or “soulwinners” or “born-again” Christians. If we think about Ede and Lunsford’s concept of a rhetor who conjures a vision and invokes roles for an imagined audience, we could say that Aguilar conjures a vision for Richmond, a vision that links the ideological to the material by making appeals to the shared concerns of born-again Christians rather than focusing on material interests that have long divided the city.

Rhetorical Analysis

Introduction

Today, Aguilar confidently presents his arguments for changing Richmond but he has admitted it took him a little while to formulate his vision for the city. In an interview with *Crosswalk Magazine* in 2007, Aguilar says that:

God took the scales off my eyes and showed me Richmond. I fell in love with it because I learned that my ministry was right here in my backyard. I saw the same problems here that affect people in Los Angeles. In Los Angeles, (the method is) to save as many people as you can before Jesus comes back. In Richmond, I saw the potential to really impact the city through Christ. (qtd. in Hawkins)

Aguilar references the Biblical story of Saul of Tarsus, a Pharisee who persecuted Christians and was blinded by God while walking on the road to Damascus. Once God removed the scales from Saul's eyes, he changed his ways and became a believer of Christ. Saul took on a new identity and became Paul—a disciple of Christ to whom nearly half of the books of the New Testament are attributed. In this reference to Paul, Aguilar illustrates how God can transform even the strongest opponents of Christianity, helping them see their true purpose, perhaps even see the purpose of a city like Richmond. In Aguilar's rhetoric of change, such conversion experiences are essential, not only theologically in order to go to Heaven, but also socially, in order to be an active member of the ROC congregation.

In this study, I have selected excerpts from sermons, devotionals, and his book that demonstrate Aguilar's rhetoric of change. Within this system of persuasion, Aguilar

projects a vision for the city and invokes an audience of people who, like him, are in need of transformation—whether from drug addiction to recovery, from poor to financially stable, from lonely to loved. In the following excerpts from his texts, Aguilar displays how he constructs ethos, characterizes his church as different, and invokes roles for an imagined audience. Linguistic features in these texts include characterizations of the ROC as a “non-traditional church” as well as sexual metaphors, allusions to sports, and popular culture, and lowbrow humor.

Assessing the Rhetorical Performance

Whether or not his addressed audience is in fact disillusioned with the traditional church, he invokes an audience that is. He does this by affirming negative stereotypes of the mainline Protestant church while characterizing the ROC as different. He says, “We are the church at Richmond. We may not technically qualify as what people call church. But it doesn’t matter what people call church, it matters what God calls church” (“Doing Church or Just Playing Church”). Aguilar built a church that looks unlike a church, and he claims ROC Christians act unlike other Christians. Aguilar has compared his congregation to mainline Protestants by way of an analogy to donuts, in a sermon called “Krispy Crème Christian.” Aguilar preaches that Christians should be more like donuts, “hot, fresh, and almost as sweet as heaven” (par. 2). ROC members, like a lot of born-again Christians, are excited about their salvation and as Aguilar says, when Christians are “hot” for Christ then they won’t be able to “shut-up about it!” Aguilar compares this kind of Christian, the recently saved, and highly spirited, “hot” Christian to those who are “cold, stale, and bitter” (par. 4).

The latter type of Christian is like those found in the mainline Protestant church, a Christian body that practices a mild spirituality that Aguilar says he does not understand. Aguilar admits he doesn't get "this dull church service. I don't really get this quiet church service. I mean, if God saved you, if God changed you, if God pulled you out of the miring clay and set your feet on solid rock, how could you not be excited about it?" (par. 4). Using this mildly provocative language—hot, fresh, sweet—is Aguilar's way of poking fun at bourgeoisie values and attitudes toward sex.

Aguilar's perception of the mainline church is a place that is uptight where people are unwilling to reach out to "the lost and forsaken" in society ("I Will Show the Love of Jesus" par. 17). In a devotional titled "I Will Show the Love of Jesus" he says that that "thing that makes The ROC different is our open door policy for those who are lost and forsaken who don't consider themselves welcome just anywhere (par. 17). Not only is the traditional church unwelcoming to the people Aguilar wants to reach, but many of those people also do not feel welcome in other public places because they are homeless, drug addicts, high-school drop outs, or people with criminal records. Aguilar emphasizes that his church is inclusive, as a way to invoke an audience of people who may feel rejected by mainline Protestant churches or feel a sense of failure for not meeting middle-class moral standards.

In the following passage from a sermon called "Doing Church or Just Playing Church" Aguilar describes Christians who take up positions of moral superiority or who are unwelcoming to people who have not made "good" choices. Aguilar claims his church does not reject or judge people as the traditional churches do. In this sermon, Aguilar describes a conversation between a ROC volunteer and another local pastor who

warned the volunteer not to attend the ROC because people there do drugs or drink alcohol. Aguilar gladly tells the audience how the ROC volunteer responded to the pastor, telling him: “You know, you got people there in the choir on drugs, you just don’t know it!” (par. 3). Aguilar tells his congregation that the Church has to let go of their practice of passing judgment and having a “holier-than-thou” attitude toward people with problems. Invoking an audience of other church leaders, Aguilar says all people have problems, “they just may be too ashamed to admit it, probably because they’re not comfortable to admit it in your church” (par. 3). Then Aguilar imagines the ROC as a church where people with problems can find help.

But see, people know if you’re on drugs, go to the ROC and they’ll help you. If you need food, go to the ROC, they’ll help you. If you’re a kid and you need someone to love you for real, go to the ROC, they’ll love you. That’s church. (par. 4)

Here, Aguilar invokes a church that is willing to accept and help those with problems. He invokes an audience of people who are Christians but who are not self-righteous and judgmental. He characterizes the church as a place of inclusion as well as a church filled with “hot, fresh, and sweet” Christians rather than staid formality and lifeless piety. Even though Aguilar refrains from naming a certain denomination or local church as embodying these characteristics, his descriptions seem to resonate with this audience despite their lack of specificity. This is evident in their responses to him when he says things like “we are a non-traditional church...thank you Jesus!” and the congregation erupts in shouts, laughter and clapping (Aguilar 18 Oct. 2009). The audience Aguilar addresses—the inner city poor, young people, recovering addicts and some middle-class

evangelicals—seems to connect with the characterizations Aguilar makes about the traditional church. The audience he invokes—an inclusive, non-judgmental church—this is who Aguilar hopes his church will become.

Other elements of contemporary culture that Aguilar draws on rhetorically are sports and youth culture, secular pop and rock-n-roll music, and fashion. During Six O'clock worship services, which take place in a large basketball gym there are multiple references to sporting events, score keeping, and teamwork. Each week, Aguilar invites someone to the stage to share the number of souls saved in the city by various soul-winning groups at the ROC. As Aguilar read off these names of each group and how many souls they were responsible for saving, members stand and cheer or applaud wildly, congratulating their team on a successful week of soul-winning. These "teams" have names like the Soul-Winning Soldiers, Guppies, Soldier Girlz, the Soulwinning Club, or The Chosen. Each has a page on the ROC web site. Some have their own logos and screen-printed t-shirts; some of the women now wear outfits from the Jesus Couture clothing line for women. These Jesus-themed products are a spin-off of the popular Juicy Couture clothing brand. Some congregants who are part of the Soulwinning Soldiers Biker Ministry wear leather biker vests to church. During church, after all the groups have been listed, the total number of souls saved is flashed onto two digital scoreboards on the sides of the stage. About this score keeping, Aguilar says, "Do I think God likes numbers? Yes. I do think God likes numbers. I think he wants everyone to be saved" (Aguilar 18 Oct. 2009). Aguilar defends the sports reference, giving it theological legitimacy by saying score keeping would please God because it is a sign of the church's commitment to sharing the Gospel. In a sports reference that has an even more tenuous

theological connection, a man joins Aguilar on stage with a t-shirt gun, and shoots t-shirts at the audience that read “Satan Sucks!” Members of the audience scramble for the t-shirts like at a basketball game. This ritual seems to be purely aimed at making worship entertaining and pleasurable rather than illustrating a theological point.

Aguilar also uses lowbrow humor to appeal to his audience. Aguilar’s humor affirms stereotypes about women and men and different races and ethnicities but at the same time could be an attempt to resist them. Although they don’t appear to offend his audience, they are jokes that might be considered in poor taste by the politically correct or those with more progressive views on gender and race. For example, during one service, I heard Aguilar make fun of over-sensitive men who “Must have grown up in a house full of women!” (Aguilar 10 Oct. 2009). Occasionally, when Aguilar talks about Christians who backslide into sinful ways he calls them “wimpy” Christians. Linking toughness with a man’s virility, Aguilar says that to be a strong Christian “You gotta grow some!” (Aguilar 10 Oct. 2009). Aguilar even makes bathroom jokes during worship. Before Aguilar starts his sermon, he reminds the audience, “If you have to go to the bathroom during the service...” The audience finishes his sentence, yelling “You better hold it!!” (Aguilar 10 Oct. 2009). Aguilar also makes off-hand remarks about race. For example, on Country Day 2009, a thematic service where people dressed up in flannel and overalls, the praise band played a Lynard Skynard song, the chorus rewritten to: “Sweet Home Up in Heaven.” When the band finished playing, Aguilar said to the bassist that he’d “never seen a black man play Lynard Skynard like that!” (Aguilar 10 Oct. 2009). Later Aguilar laughed at his own outfit and said: “you don’t usually see Mexicans wearing overalls” (Aguilar 10 Oct. 2009).

On the one hand, Aguilar affirms ethnic stereotypes about “white” music or the kind of clothing Mexicans wear and on the other hand he invokes an audience of people for whom race is not a conditioning factor of their identities. In a testimonial given in Los Angeles, Aguilar describes the divided nature of Richmond: “Everything in Richmond is divided, black, white, you know, everything is divided, rich, poor, everything was divided before we got there” yet he also claims to see these divisions being healed at the ROC (“Testimonial”). He says in a sermon given at the ROC: “we are the body of Christ here. It is the coolest thing to be up here and see this crowd. To see people from the north and the south. To see people with all different colored skin” (“Doing Church or Just Playing Church”). Perhaps he can envision a multi-ethnic church because of his own heritage as a Mexican-American. As he does in his messages about the traditional church, Aguilar seems to address an audience as they are now—people conditioned to think of themselves as blacks, whites, Latinos—but invokes an audience as they might become—people who think of themselves as Christians, united in their faith and not divided by race.

Aguilar draws on the rhetorical culture of this particular audience by telling jokes and using metaphors, characterizations and allusions to popular culture they recognize and connect with. This is how he reaches out to the young, working class and poor, or people who are tired of the decorum of the traditional church. Interestingly, Aguilar does not challenge traditional gender roles or stereotypes, and in fact affirms them. Nor does he address whether his church would be inclusive of people who identify as GLBT. He focuses on invoking a church that is inclusive, and acts as a unified body of Christ despite the different racial or material conditions that have shaped their decisions or identities.

Assessing the texts: structure, common topics and themes

Because Aguilar knows that racial and material conditions are important to his congregation he often preaches on themes that allow him to address both their ideological and economic interests. The structure of his texts and the common topics he addresses are part of his strategy for addressing the social problems they face. In fact, most of his sermons and devotionals deal with contemporary affairs. In describing the politics of the Black Church, Manning Marable referred to a 1933 study that classified Black sermons into three categories: those that were “devoted to theological doctrine,” those that were “other-worldly” or those that addressed secular affairs (200). By the Civil Rights era, Marable says the Black church was perceived as out of touch with the problems facing African-Americans—perhaps because they did not preach on contemporary affairs such as economic injustice (201). Marable observes that in the Black church, an “other-worldly” focus refers to those preachers who, for example, “emphasize prayer over politics, salvation over suffrage, the study of Ecclesiastes over the construction of economic cooperatives” (213). The theologically focused sermons might serve to create a “refuge” for Black people, using church services and the scriptures as a place where they could escape the pressures of life (200).

Aguilar is less interested in theology and more interested in its application. Even Aguilar recognizes that his sermons are not theologically complex. Tongue in cheek, he tells the congregation before opening the Krispy Crème sermon, that they should “listen up!” because this is going to be really “spiritually deep.” Then he proceeds to make his point about how Christians should be “hot, fresh, and sweet” just like donuts (par. 2). Likewise, his sermons are rarely spiritual or “other-worldly,” but instead focus on the

problems people face and how they might resolve them. Of the sermons and devotionals I have encountered at the ROC, most devote about a quarter of the message to theological exegesis and then move on to the practical application of scripture and its relation to contemporary secular affairs—which take up about three-quarters of a sermon or devotional.

Because people from many different denominations attend his weekly services, Aguilar avoids being dogmatic about Biblical doctrine. For example, in the following devotion titled “Whatever You Call it—Get it!” about the Holy Spirit, Aguilar emphasizes that personal belief is up to the individual—he is simply concerned with how Christians apply that belief in their lives.

It's not about what I believe about the Holy Spirit. My goal is to get you concerned about what you believe about the Holy Spirit. It doesn't matter what you call it. All I have to say is whatever you call it, you need to get it. (par. 3)

This focus on the application of the scriptures, rather than the meaning of the texts is common across Aguilar’s sermons and devotionals. This emphasis on deriving practical import from the scriptures displays the interrelated nature of the speaker, audience, and text. Scriptures do not just possess meaning that Aguilar reveals through exegesis, rather he negotiates new meaning through conversations with friends, Bible study, or worship services, where congregants consider how the scripture applies to their lives and their church.

For example, in another devotional titled “Also,” Aguilar reflects on a passage from Chronicles about three of King David’s men, one of whom, in addition to killing a giant Egyptian and two lionlike men of Moab, also went down and killed a lion in a pit

on a snowy day (par. 2). Aguilar describes a friend who told him this passage made him think about the ROC as an “also” ministry, one that goes above and beyond its call to duty. Using the idea of going above and beyond from this passage, Aguilar delivers a message he repeats all the time: the ROC is not just a church where people come for spiritual renewal, or to talk about theology; it is a church where people come to act. Not only do ROC Christians act within their church; they act within their city. He writes, “In the past nine years, The ROC mission has been to be an "also" church.”

We don't just go to church, we also bring people to church. We don't just pray for people, we also help people. We don't hope you get off drugs, we also help you get off drugs. We don't just talk about Jesus in here, we also talk about Jesus out there. Nothing says we have to literally be the church 24/7, we do it because we choose to be an "also" church that doesn't just talk the talk, but we walk the walk.

(par. 9)

Aguilar uses anaphora here, repeating the phrase “We don't” at the beginning of successive clauses that state what the ROC does, in comparison to other churches. This technique emphasizes Aguilar's point that the ROC is about more than religious or discursive practices: liturgy, prayer, and talking about Jesus. They are about action.

Evidence for such a claim resides in the very visible work he and his 2,000-plus congregants do each week through 150 different ministries, which have provided food, school supplies and health care to hundreds of people and purportedly kept kids in high school, cleaned up public housing, and saved tax payers thousands of dollars. Other churches like St. Paul's also have creative programming, but do not report on their website that they have had such a quantifiable impact on the city of Richmond, nor do

they claim to have so many of their congregants involved in direct service ministries, despite having a membership of 12,000. If they do the level of outreach that the ROC does, they go about it more quietly than the ROC. Although Aguilar does not disclose exactly how many of his members are involved in the church's 150 ministries, he does emphasize that if you plan to join the ROC, you must be ready to do service.

It is likely Aguilar addresses a known congregation of individuals dedicated to service. But for those who are new to the ROC's style of ministry, or who need a reminder of their Christian duty, Aguilar repeatedly invokes a church of Christians dedicated to helping the poor, addicted, homeless, and children and youth. He invokes a rhetorical audience, in the sense Lloyd Bitzer imagined them, as people who are "capable of being influenced by discourse *and* can mediate change" (221).

In order to motivate his congregation—some who are poor, others who are middle class—to mediate change, Aguilar uses a theological argument that God loves everyone, both the rich and poor, but has a special place in his heart for poor people. That is why "The ROC is designed to reach everyone who is lost – rich and poor, but we put a special emphasis on helping the poor" ("Helping the Poor" par. 3). Unlike some clergy in the Black Church who, according to Manning Marable have elected not to focus on economic or political affairs that affect their congregants, in nearly every sermon and devotional, Aguilar talks about the material conditions of poor people's lives and the "issues" that they breed. These issues include drug and alcohol addiction, homelessness, and hunger, financial problems, failing marriages, sex out of marriage, sickness, disease, depression, and loneliness. As Aguilar presents them, these issues are inherent within individuals

perhaps due to humanity's sinful nature, but also can be caused by evil forces in the world around us.

As an evangelical and socially minded Christian it is not surprising that Aguilar emphasizes the plight of the poor in his sermons. What is notable is how Aguilar tries to link the interests of the middle class with the needs of the poor. He does this by emphasizing that all of us have problems, not just the poor. He writes: "We all have issues. If we say we don't, we are in denial. We live in a broken world and that alone is enough to cause us to have issues." ("Dealing with Your Issues" par. 1) Aguilar admits he had his own problems, establishing the credibility needed to talk about the change in awareness that comes from believing in God. In a 2006 interview with the Christian Broadcasting Network, Aguilar says he was "at the bottom of the barrel when He saved me" (qtd. in White 1). "He completely took me, a poor little street kid from LA who was in a gang, doing drugs and getting into all kinds of trouble. He changed my life. So if He can change me, there's no one He can't change (qtd. in White 1).

Aguilar is able to find common ground between the rich and poor, by linking the ideological concerns of the middle class with the material concerns of poor people. He focuses on motivating his congregation to collectively commit to addressing the city's problems. To do so, he does not suggest that the rich, middle class, or poor actually have to change the socio-economic system that creates income disparity; they just have to work at redistributing some of its resources. Such redistribution—of money donated or time spent tutoring a child—momentarily alleviates the pressure of poverty and allows the upwardly mobile to feel good about their ability to give and fulfill their Christian duty to serve the poor. Everyone benefits from serving the poor, according to Aguilar.

In his devotional titled “Helping the Poor” Aguilar writes that if people consider the poor, then God will “turn your world upside down with His blessings and goodness” (par. 12). Not only does helping the poor alleviate the pressures of poverty, but it provides perspective for individuals narrowly focused on their own struggles. In the following passage from the devotional “Helping the Poor,” Aguilar illustrates what focusing on others means, and describes what it might look like if someone signed up to help with the Bus Ministry, picking up kids from public housing. He uses the second person pronoun “you” so that his audience might be able to imagine themselves experiencing the lives of some of the poor people living in Richmond as Aguilar describes it.

You knock on the door where most of the time there is no father, eight kids, and a single mom who is probably strung out or at best, struggling to raise her kids with very little finances or support. You bring those kids for a few hours of joy at the happiest place on earth, and then you get back on the bus to take them home. (par. 10)

In this passage, Aguilar not only imagines the kind of people his audience should be motivated to help but also characterizes his church as “the happiest place on earth” for children living in poverty. Describing the church as an escape from these conditions, may appeal to young people in the audience who seek this escape, as well as to the Christians who seek to escape their own burdens by shifting their focus to others. Aguilar insists that middle-class Christians who attend the ROC may be able to alleviate the symptoms of poverty. In doing so, they may also alleviate symptoms of affluence: anxiety or pressure that the middle class feels to maintain their middle class status and any guilt about having

moved up and away from poverty. Aguilar finds some common ground by linking the ideological concerns of middle class Christians with the material concerns of poor people.

Aguilar emphasizes the issues that poor people face but he also talks about the issues of affluence, in an effort to establish common ground between his congregants and perhaps to invoke a community in Richmond of people with greater empathy for one another. He reminds his audience that even if they struggle with different burdens, “we are all in the same boat” (“Helping the Poor” par. 3). From a theological perspective, Aguilar believes that “When God talks about the poor, he is not just talking about money. God is referring to the poor in spirit, broken down, broken-hearted individuals who have no hope, purpose, or meaning in their lives” (“Helping the Poor” par. 4). Poor people are really those who *only* have material possessions, he says (“Letting Go of that Nickel” par. 7). These poor people, the ones who have material wealth, they have problems too, one of which is the struggle to maintain a middle class lifestyle.

In a devotional titled, “Letting Go of That Nickel” Aguilar describes the world as a place where people care more about material possessions than they do about God. He tells the story of a little boy who got his arm stuck in his mother’s vase, because he would not let go of a nickel he dropped inside. As a result, the mother had to break her valuable vase only to find out her son could have freed himself if he were willing to let go of the nickel. Aguilar says of course people need to have a job, so they can care for their families and tithe, but some Americans have pursued the “American Dream” too far. They must let go of the nickel. After all, the “American Dream” is not God’s dream, Aguilar says.

The "American Dream" comes with a high price tag. Too many times it costs husbands and wives their marriage, resulting in a broken relationship, single mothers who are forced to work to care for their children, and children who are victims of divorce. Part of the problem is the way the "American Dream" keeps families out of church and not involved in the things of God. That's a nickel that many need to let go of, Church. (par. 8)

Aguilar suggests that affluence and addiction to work can bring about other social issues such as divorce, broken homes, single parenthood, and the decline in church attendance. He calls for people to reject the demands and expectations of their jobs, saying they have to “get off that ladder while you still have a chance” (par. 8). Worldly achievements such as jobs, promotions and salaries are not as important as family or knowing God. In this passage Aguilar speaks to a known audience—the affluent members of his congregation and encourages them to become more invested in God and in service than in growing their material wealth. Here, Aguilar defines which elements of American culture he rejects and which he accepts. He rejects the American Dream if it means more consumerist behavior and vying for worldly promotions. But ironically, the principles that guide the American Dream: hard work, education, and material success are also principles at the foundation of Aguilar’s work ethic and consumerist behavior is in part responsible for the successful growth of his church.

According to the organization’s public records, Aguilar works 80 hours per week, as do many of his head pastors (“Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax” 2008). He houses a church in a building that looks more like a shopping mall than a church, where he sells merchandise and runs a café, bookstore, and hair salon. Even

Aguilar's own rise to success has had some of the same casualties he claims will come from an addiction to worldly success: these included the breakup of his first marriage and the move away from his two children to travel with a Christian rap band and start a ministry in Virginia. According to the book, *Churches that Abuse*, by Ronald Enroth, for a while after he was saved, Aguilar lived with his father in one of his father's group homes and worked in his Set-Free ministry (par. 40). At a young age Aguilar married one of the members of the Set Free ministry and had two children. According to interviews with her sister, Aguilar's wife was isolated from her family and made to serve Geronimo, like many of the women within the Set-Free ministry must serve their husbands. Aguilar and his first wife were eventually divorced after Aguilar began traveling the country with a Christian rap group In4Life. Though scant, several blog posts on Rick Ross's "Cult Education Forum" describe that marriage ending because of a scandalous affair with Aguilar's second wife Samantha, also a Christian musician (www.forum.rickross.com). Aguilar's two children from this previous marriage do not live with him in Virginia.

Of course, this story is not told from the pulpit. But the contradiction is present when we compare what Aguilar says about affluence and his own conspicuous display of materialism in the construction of the church and the consumer goods they produce. In his rhetoric of change, this tension presents itself in the way Aguilar describes the root causes of poverty and affluence—not as structural injustices too large to resolve—but as matters of personal responsibility or evil forces that his audience has the power to fight.

Themes of Personal Responsibility & Fighting

Once Aguilar has linked the ideological and material concerns of his audience, he can begin to articulate how Richmond should change and what ROC congregants can do

to facilitate this change. As suggested in the reports by Dr. Jim Crupi and the Mayor, the current model for social change in Richmond should include strategic planning processes, governmental and school reforms and economic development plans. In contrast, the ROC model for change is based on the personal or spiritual transformation of individuals.

Aguilar reasons that if he can be changed, and if others at the ROC can be changed, then the entire city of Richmond can be changed—and not through political or economic reforms. Change is possible because born-again Christians have been transformed spiritually and are thus qualified to help others change. In a devotional titled “The Kind of Soldier God Uses” Aguilar tells his audience, “God uses people who are wounded and broken to reach a world that is wounded and broken. There are people who are like we used to be, and nobody can help them like we can” (par. 10). The facilitation of structural change is likely outside the purview of many of Aguilar’s congregants, most of whom are poor, working, or middle class. But soulwinning and service are methods of change his congregants can likely participate in—and helping them see this is Aguilar’s goal in the following texts.

When Aguilar argues that change can come at the hands of his congregation, he relies on theological belief that those who do God’s work will be blessed. Aguilar calls God’s work his “business” and says that if you “take care of God’s business he will take care of yours” (par. 11). He assures his audience that their work to uplift the city will be rewarded. But he is concerned there are not enough people in the city of Richmond who are “taking care of God’s business.” In his book, *Soulwinning is Not a Gift*, Aguilar references the Biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah, saying God didn’t destroy the city of Sodom because of all the wicked things people there were doing, but because he

couldn't find anyone there who loved him (73). That provides the theological directive for his audience to go out and convince more people in Richmond to love Jesus. If more people love Jesus, then the city is bound to change in a way that pleases God (73).

By Aguilar's reasoning, converting people to Christianity can free them, not just from the psychological or spiritual chains that bind them, but the material chains as well. In *Soulwinning is Not a Gift*, Aguilar claims that soulwinning can do more than social programming efforts to reform addicts and clean up cities.

Soulwinning brings change. Soulwinning will sober up more alcoholics and addicts than AA and NA put together. Soulwinning will clean up more projects than the police. Soulwinning will feed more hungry people than welfare ever will.

(*Soulwinning* 10)

Just like churches that talk the talk but don't walk the walk Aguilar has little faith that politicians follow through on their "promises and rhetoric about how change is coming and differences are going to be made" (71). Rather, Aguilar claims "the only real and lasting change that will make a difference is a life that has been changed by the power of God" (72). What may be the most persuasive line of reasoning for soulwinning as a method of change is that it can start in the backyards of ordinary people. Change that makes a difference "is going to be made by ordinary people like you and me allowing the Lord to do extraordinary things through us" (71). This change may start small—with the salvation of a single soul—but it can have a national impact, Aguilar says. It can be more real and lasting than any of the changes politicians offer. "If enough of us just focus on our little worlds all across America, we can save America," Aguilar writes (72).

Aguilar provides opportunities for soulwinning through the ROC's one-hundred and fifty ministries. Aguilar writes in *Soulwinning*: "whether it is the food program, the after-school program, the computer, ESL, or reading classes, every program is happening to create opportunities to help the needy" (39). These programs also exist to "tell others about Jesus Christ and to use the Word of God as a textbook for how to live the Christian life" (39). There are ample opportunities at the ROC for volunteers to resolve the exigencies Aguilar presents, yet this process must be easier said than done. Aguilar devotes a lot of time in his sermons and devotionals trying to convince his audience to become the agents of change he hopes they will become.

Aguilar often makes appeals to the individual to inculcate values of personal responsibility, perseverance, and hard work needed to take care of God's business. Appeals to an individual's personal responsibility align with a view of social issues as the consequence of an individual's sinful nature and poor decision-making. People make bad choices to do drugs, fall out of marriage, steal, or drop out of school. In other texts, Aguilar makes appeals to his audience to become soldiers in the fight against evil forces. These appeals align with the view of social issues as the consequence of some larger system which people are powerless to change. Aguilar calls them evil forces but he never really explains what these evil forces are. Instead, he calls them the Devil or Satan; they are the forces that cause worry, strife, illness, loneliness, financial insecurity, and despair.

Aguilar takes great pains to convince people that doing the "right thing" like soulwinning, serving the poor, and changing the city are worth it. He has written an entire devotional explaining why, titled "Doing The Hard Thing." In this devotional he is invoking an audience of Christians who do not shy away from doing the hard thing, and a

church that steps up to the plate and chooses to take on difficult tasks. He says this is “the only way our city will ever be changed or our country brought back to God” (par. 3). For individuals, “setting boundaries and saying no to sin is not easy – it is the hard thing, but it is also the RIGHT thing,” Aguilar writes (par. 22). He argues that life is difficult because people have not worked hard enough to make it easier. If they want to experience happiness and the riches God promises, they must work hard, not at their jobs or their own pursuits, but at God’s business.

In a devotional titled “Throw Down What you Have and Pick up what God has,” Aguilar poses rhetorical questions to his audience about the financial hardships they have faced. “Do you wonder why you have such a hard time financially? Have you considered that you are trying to make it financially through your own strength? Do you feel like God isn't providing for you?” he asks the audience (par. 11). He goes on to suggest that the reason they struggle to provide for themselves and their families is because they have not let go of their own desires for the Lord’s desires. The ROC, on the other hand has trusted God and as a result, God has provided for the ROC, making it possible for them to recently move into a 13 million dollar facility debt free. Aguilar says that the ROC keeps “giving and giving and giving, and God keeps giving and giving and giving -- and you simply can't out give God” (par. 11).

In order to enjoy the riches that God promises, Christians at the ROC must work hard and must take care of God’s business. They also must recognize that it is their personal responsibility as Christians to change the city of Richmond, even if it requires hard work. He extends the purview of their responsibility as Christians beyond dealing with their own issues, to dealing with issues in their city. In his sermon “Doing Church or

Just Playing Church” he tells his congregation: “You have to reach YOUR community. I’m not talking about the Christian community. You have to reach YOUR community. Community should know that the church cares” (par. 4). Aguilar encourages the ROC community not only to care for one another but to care for Richmond, including people in public housing, failing high schools, downtown hospitals, parks, and city jails.

Again and again, Aguilar preaches and writes on the responsibility his audience has to others and to their city. In a devotional titled “Because of You” he interrogates his audience and invokes roles for them, as life-changers, teachers of the gospel, bus drivers, service providers, care-givers at a hospital, encouragers, and soulwinners. He uses anaphora again here as well, repeating the introductory clause, “Because of you” to encourage the audience to look inward and think about their contributions to others.

Because of you, whose life has been changed? Because of you, who has been won to the Lord? Because of you, who is not the person they used to be? Because of you, who is going to church now and learning how to live the Christian life? Because of you, how many kids are riding our buses to kids’ service every week? Because of you, what needs of others are being met? Because of you, who has seen the love of Christ manifested in practical ways? Because of you, how many people have been visited in the hospital? Because of you, how many inmates have heard the gospel? Because of you, how many lonely elderly people have been encouraged? Because of you, how many people are going to Heaven? Because of you, whose name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life? Ask yourself this question: Because of me, whose life is forever changed? (par. 8)

This is one of the passages where Aguilar is most direct about the roles his audience might take in alleviating some of the material or spiritual suffering of their neighbors. His use of interrogation works to drive home the message that the responsibility for service and soulwinning does not fall on another person—it falls on the reader or listener of that text. Given the range of options Aguilar provides, they can decide which role they might like to adopt. In these appeals to his audience, Aguilar explains why many people struggle with poverty, addiction, sin, financial instability or worry—because they have not worked hard enough toward the right goals, they have not persevered at doing the hard thing, or they have not upheld their personal responsibility to their community.

Sometimes Aguilar describes social issues as a failure of hard work, personal responsibility, and perseverance, but at other times, Aguilar describes these issues as a result of the Devil's work or evil forces outside of an individual's control. In passages where Aguilar characterizes social issues as a function of evil forces, he appeals to his audience to take up roles as soldiers who must "fight" to win back from this force what it has stolen. He refrains from saying that the source of social issues is a capitalist socio-economic system or a gerrymandered metro region that essentially traps minorities in a city with failing schools, poor public transportation and inadequate job opportunities. He insists that social problems are either a result of failed personal responsibility on the part of depraved humans or the work of some metaphysical evil force.

As seen in the a devotional titled, "Giving Thanks to The Soldiers" Aguilar describes Richmond as a place under attack. He says, "Make no mistake, Church. We are at war. We have an enemy. You can call him Satan or the Devil or the Evil One. Whatever you call him, he is our enemy and we are in God's Army, fighting that enemy"

(par. 8). He says, “Anyone who is going to serve Jesus has to be a Soldier” (par. 8). Such characterizations communicate to his audience that they should understand what they’re getting themselves into. Being a Christian is not easy; it is both physically and spiritually demanding and requires constantly being on the lookout for evil forces in the world. He tells his congregation that you cannot “be a wimp and serve Jesus. It is just not possible. Christianity demands too much for wimps to make it. I am talking about physically, as well as spiritually (par. 8).

This aggressive rhetoric works to reach his audience—particularly those members of the biker ministry, the Soulwinning Soldiers. He also uses these characterizations to invoke a collective identity for the audience as members of God’s Army. Although he acknowledges that soulwinning and fighting a war are different, Aguilar uses this analogy to war to draw out the idea that the physical and emotional hardships endured by the Soulwinning Soldiers and the United States Army are similar. The virtues of both groups are derived from their selflessness and from their loyalty and allegiance to some larger body. Soldiers and soulwinners both volunteer for the difficult work they do. In a sermon on people in military service, Aguilar says, “I also want to say thank you to another group of Soldiers -- the men and women who are fighting for the cause of Christ – those who have volunteered for God’s Army. It is an entirely different kind of warfare, but never forget, it is a war” (par. 8).

Aguilar also invokes an audience of people who have collective ownership of the city. In a devotional titled “Go and Get It!” Aguilar says his congregation must “take back what the enemy has stolen” in the city of Richmond. He uses another fighting analogy using the Biblical story of David and Goliath. He alludes to King David and his

mighty men, only he says that at the ROC, it is “Pastor G and his mighty men, women, teenagers, and children” who are fighting to take back what God intended them to have (par. 6).

We are not going to sit back and let the devil steal from us what God intends for us to have, Church. The enemy has been destroying our city for years, and we have decided it is time to take it back. We decided to go into the entire city – the southside, the northside, the east end, and the west end. We decided to go into the streets, the parks, and the projects. (par. 7)

As Aguilar does in the “Because of You” devotional, in this passage he offers the audience several geographic locations where they could imagine themselves fighting to take back the city. He names the streets, the parks, the projects—all urban locations nonspecific to Richmond. Aguilar does not use the word community here, as he does in the messages on personal responsibility, perhaps because the term community can connote an unrealistic sense of unity. Here, Aguilar instead presents the city as a place of discord, a place infiltrated by the enemy, a place that has been robbed of peace and prosperity. He invokes an audience on a mission to take back the city and to restore it. This mission justifies the recent construction of the Big House.

In Joshua 6:16, we read, “*Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city.*” People ask why do you need to build a Big House? Why do you need so many seats? It’s because we are on a mission to take back our city. We are taking back what the devil thought he could get away with stealing from the Kingdom of God. God is serious about helping His children do the work of the Kingdom, and He is making

it possible for us to go debt free into a \$13 million dollar facility that will help us take back our city. (par. 8)

Aguilar perceives evil in the world as the work of the devil. And in his rhetoric of change, the devil is sometimes a metaphor for the root cause of social problems. When Aguilar talks about the enemy his Christian soldiers are fighting in Richmond, he uses the image of the devil rather than naming the enemy as an economic or political system that disenfranchises the poor. Being vague with his definitions of the term “enemy” allows him to blame the devil for nearly anything that gets in the way of doing God’s business. For example, in *Soulwinning is Not a Gift*, Aguilar has instructed soulwinners to interpret something as simple as a child crying for its mother while they are preaching the gospel as the devil trying to interfere with their soulwinning. Thus, one soulwinner should offer to hold the child while the other preaches the gospel (81).

In Aguilar’s rhetoric of change, spiritual and material poverty are the conditions that must change in the city of Richmond. To change these conditions, Aguilar must persuade his audience to see these issues as exigencies and then come to understand them as either the failure of personal responsibility, or the fault of the Devil, who causes worry, increases doubt, and steals away health, peace, and prosperity. As Aguilar presents it, an audience that wants to mediate change must increase their commitment to doing “God’s business” of soulwinning or serving the poor. They must constantly be on the lookout for evil forces in the world. Characterizing material conditions like the unequal distribution of resources as the devil’s work relieves individuals from the burden of facilitating political or economic reform. Insisting that poor people can change their city is empowering.

This rhetoric of change is communicated during contemporary worship services, by a charismatic Latino preacher with street credibility and an awareness of the rhetorical culture of the audience he addresses. His rhetoric emerges uniquely from this particular material and political situation—a city long divided by race and class and in need of visionary leadership and a program for change that unites people. His response may not be theologically unique but his timing and ability to craft ethos are. Successfully, Aguilar manages elements of the rhetorical situation, naming exigencies, articulating roles for his audience and envisioning a future for his church and for Richmond. It would seem then, that his rhetoric of change is a strong factor in the Richmond Outreach Center’s growth.

On Therapeutic Discourse

While Aguilar’s rhetoric of change is likely empowering to people who have not thought of themselves as agents of change, Marxist theorist Dana Cloud would call this therapeutic discourse because it “has a tendency to encourage citizens to perceive political issues, conflicts, and inequities as personal failures subject to personal amelioration” (Cloud 30). She notes similarities between therapeutic discourses and religion, which “both assume intrapsychic origins of change” (20). Cloud is concerned that therapeutic discourse diverts criticism from the root causes of social injustice and therefore lacks political efficacy.

Others such as Mark Satin, who Cloud quotes in her book, *Control and Consolation in American Culture and Politics*, believe that pre-political activity of the discursive kind can actually bring about systemic change. Unlike Cloud, Satin says it is a “prison mindset” that really restricts people, not economics. If people would change their thinking about the systems that oppress them, they might start to view the system that binds them

as less prison-like. He proposes that if enough consciousness-raising occurs, then the structures that control people's lives will be forced to change (20).

Aguilar raises consciousness about the social issues facing Richmond, which is a start, in a region where many people who live in the counties do not know about the problems, or many assets, of the inner city. But he does not raise consciousness about the socio-economic system and a series of historical decisions that created income disparity, pockets of poverty, lack of affordable housing, or the deficit of living-wage jobs for minorities. He does not make structural critiques. And there are several reasons why. The bottom line is that it would not serve his interests. Reaching the poor with God's message is Aguilar's mission. Gramsci might say that Aguilar avoids structural critique because of a Christian passivity or confidence in the power of resurrection and the after-life, all of which may also be true. But Aguilar's focus on social issues is evidence that he is not passive—he cares deeply about social problems and works hard to alleviate the suffering of the poor. Another reason Aguilar does not seem to push a structural critique is because he can offer an alternative social system—within the private realm—through which growing number of people can participate in public activities that they might otherwise enjoy if they were not poor or disenfranchised.

First of all, he offers opportunities to further one's education through the ROC's pre-school, after-school care, ESOL tutoring, parenting classes, and financial management classes. Children can get a secondary education at the Elijah House and adults can get a higher degree at the ROC's School of Urban Ministry. Secondly, he offers opportunities for recreation and leisure. Members of the ROC can play organized sports, work out at a gym, take dance classes, hang out and the skateboarding park and

even participate in a mixed martial-arts club. He offers a health clinic for people without insurance and a food bank for people with no money to eat. Most attractive of all, Aguilar offers a place where the poor, working class, and lower middle class members of his congregation can shop. At the Love of Jesus Thrift Store, people can buy affordable clothing. At the Big House, people can buy boutique-like clothing or screen-printed t-shirts, books, CDs, and other ROC paraphernalia. They can eat at the ROC café, get their hair done and do their laundry in a safe place.

Conclusion

I started this study of the Richmond Outreach Center with questions about what makes the ROC successful in light of the decline in church membership of mainline churches. What I have found through this study of the literature on church growth and decline is that there seems to be a rubric for success that combines theological, institutional, and contextual elements, a rubric that the ROC has been able to fit. The church has shown responsiveness to these elements at a pace that mainline churches will probably never reach. Aguilar has started a non-denominational evangelical church in a time when more American Christians are identifying as evangelicals. He has built a non-traditional megachurch with an urban aesthetic within the inner city and he offers programs that attract the underserved populations there. Clearly, emulating the ROC's theological and institutional makeup or following their response to this social context would be nearly impossible for mainline churches. But Aguilar has done more than simply align the right set of theological, institutional, and sociological elements. He has developed a coherent system of persuasion that says the city must change and average people can be part of this change. Surprisingly, developing a system of persuasion is

something mainline Christian churches and civic leaders who are familiar with the rhetorical tradition should probably be able to do well. But do they?

Church leaders and city leaders could learn from Aguilar's construction of a rhetoric of change. While leaders cannot readily change whether their audience perceives them as charismatic nor change their personal history, ethnicity, or educational levels, they can cultivate ethos as the preachers in Moss's study did by using collective pronouns and like Aguilar does by drawing on the rhetorical culture of the particular audience they address. As Aguilar does when he uses the terms "soulwinners" or "born-again Christians" or "soldiers," leaders might also cultivate a collective identity for their audience as members of a team dedicated to some goal. But they first must establish why this goal or mission is exigent. Then they should try to invoke roles for the individual members of their congregations or social movements as mediators of change. This involves negotiating individual interests, linking them to the identity of the collective group and to the overarching mission or goal. This discursive practice is certainly in place already within the volunteer recruitment or fundraising campaigns of faith and nonprofit communities as well as within social movements that are trying to gain members.

But the take-away from Aguilar's performance is that individual and group identities can no longer be assumed but must be renegotiated constantly. It probably will not be effective to communicate with an audience about their roles in programs for change just twice a year or through a uni-directional mode of communication such as a church bulletin. If a leader wants his or her audience to mediate change they must articulate individual roles and collective identities regularly and commit to renegotiating these elements, during every speech event and in every text. They must also be attuned to their

context and to the particular ideological and material conditions—or constraints—that shape their addressed audience. Knowing these conditions and addressing the audience as they are now is the first step toward invoking an audience as they might become.

If we want to theorize this process, we could say that the rhetoric of religious leaders and social movements must recognize difference among audience members more than it has in the past. Rhetors should start to consider how their speech events or texts can be governed “by logics of articulation” rather than by logics of influence. They need to embrace that moments of interaction between speaker and audience occur are about creating new identities, not just affirming existing identities. This means allowing for the possibility of change, a prospect that can make some churches or cities like Richmond uncomfortable. Such organizations and entities might prefer to operate on *chronos* time, which is measured, quantifiable, and slow. But perhaps they need to instead be attuned to the principle of *kairos*, the time “when ‘an individual undergoes the change...necessary for a new understanding of Being’”(3). A rhetoric of change can be successful if it guides an audience to believe change is necessary and that they are capable of creating change—within themselves and within their community.

Bibliography

Bibliography

- Aguilar, Geronimo. "Also." *Pastor G's Weekly Devotional*. Richmond Outreach Center. 23 August 2010. E-mail.
- . "Because of You." *Pastor G's Weekly Devotional*. Richmond Outreach Center. 31 May 2010. E-mail.
- . "Giving Thanks to The Soldiers." *Pastor G's Weekly Devotional*. Richmond Outreach Center. 31 May 2010. E-mail.
- . "Doing the Hard Thing." *Pastor G's Weekly Devotional*. Richmond Outreach Center. 12 April 2010. E-mail.
- . "Having Church or Playing Church." Sermon. Richmond Outreach Center. 10 June 2010. Web.
- . "How Helping the Poor Can Help You." *Pastor G's Weekly Devotional*. Richmond Outreach Center. 10 January 2008. E-mail.
- . "I Will Show the Love of Jesus." *Pastor G's Weekly Devotional*. Richmond Outreach Center. 15 February 2010. E-mail.
- . "The Kind of Soldier God Uses." *Pastor G's Weekly Devotional*. Richmond Outreach Center. 14 April 2008. E-mail.
- . "Krispy Crème Christianity." Sermon. Richmond Outreach Center. 14 November 2009. Web.
- . "Letting Go of That Nickel." *Pastor G's Weekly Devotional*. Richmond Outreach Center. 14 June 2010. E-mail.
- . *Soulwinning is Not a Gift: A Practical Guide to Equip Every Christian to be a Soulwinner*. Richmond, Virginia: ROC Ink Press, 2009. Print.
- . "Testimonial." L.A. Dream Center, Los Angeles. 5 March, 2009. Web.
- . "Throw Down What You Have and Pick Up What God Has." *Pastor G's Weekly Devotional*. Richmond Outreach Center. 31 May 2010. E-mail.
- . "Whatever You Call it—Get it!" *Pastor G's Weekly Devotional*. Richmond Outreach Center. 26 July 2010. E-mail.

- . "Worry." *Pastor G's Weekly Devotional*. Richmond Outreach Center. 14 June 2010. E-mail.
- Aristotle. *Rhetoric*. Book I. *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*. Eds. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg. 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2001. 179-213. Print.
- "Basic Beliefs." www.sbc.net. *SBC.net*. The Southern Baptist Convention, 2010. 14 October 2010.
- Biesecker, Barbara. "Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation from within the Thematic of Différance." *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory*. Edited by Celeste Condit, John-Michael Lucaites and Sally Caudill. New York: The Guilford Press, 1999. 232-245. Print.
- Bitzer, Lloyd. "The Rhetorical Situation." *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory*. Edited by Celeste Condit, John-Michael Lucaites and Sally Caudill. New York: The Guilford Press, 1999. 217-225. Print.
- Brandon, Yvonne. "Back to School Message from Superintendent." *Richmond Public Schools Web Site*. Richmond Public Schools, August 2010. Web. 10 September 2010.
- Campbell, Ben. Personal Interview. May 20, 2010.
- Cloud, Dana. *Control and Consolation in American Culture and Politics*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 1997. Print.
- "Community Profiles" *Annie E. Casey Foundation*. www.kidscount.org. 2008. Web. 5 February 2010.
- Condit, Celeste Michelle and John Louis Lucaites. *Crafting Equality: America's Anglo-African Word*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1993. Print.
- Corcoran, Rob. *Trustbuilding: An Honest Conversation on Race, Reconciliation, and Responsibility*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010. Print.
- Crupi, Jim, C. "Putting the Future Together." Plano, Texas: Strategic Leadership Solutions, 2007. Retrieved from: <http://lmrcommunity.wordpress.com>
- Crupi, Jim, C. "Back to the Future: Richmond at the Crossroads." Plano, Texas: Strategic Leadership Solutions, 1993.
- A Dictionary of Religion and Ethics*. Edited by Shalier Matthews and Gerald Birney Smith. New York: Macmillan Company, 1921. Web. 14 September 2010.

- The Disaster Center. "Uniform Crime Reports and Index of Crime in Richmond"
www.disastercenter.com/virginia/crime/13986.htm. Web. 30 October 2010.
- "Dr. Lance Watson Biography." www.myspbc.com. St. Paul's Baptist Church, 2010.
 Web. 10 August 2010.
- Elliot, Ralph. "Dangers of the Church Growth Movement." Religion Online.
www.religion-online.org. Web. 5 December 2009. Originally published in *The Christian Century*, 1981. 799-801.
- Enroth, Ronald. *Churches that Abuse*. Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1992. Republished
 online www.apologeticsindex.org. Chapter 1. Web. 15 November 2009.
- Fulton, John. "Notes on Religion and Politics in Gramsci: An Introduction." *Sociological
 Analysis* 48.3 (1987): 197-216. Web.
- Hauser, Gerald & Susan Whalen. "New Rhetoric and Social Movements." *Emerging
 Theories of Human Communication*. Ed. Branislav Kovacic. Albany: SUNY
 University Press, 1997. 115-40. Web. 5 December 2009.
- Hawkins, Stacy. "Winning Souls by Any Means Necessary." *Crosswalk Magazine* April
 2, 2007. Web. 18 November 2009.
- "How We Impact the Community" www.richmondoutreachcenter.com Richmond
 Outreach Center, n.d. Web. 14 October 2010.
- Inskeep, Richard. "A Short History of Church Growth Research." *Church and
 Denominational Growth*. Eds. David A Rozen and C. Kirk Hadaway. Nashville:
 Abingdon Press, 1993. Out of Print. Retrieved online 14 October 2010.
- "It All Comes Down to This." Weblog post. July 13, 2009. www.saverichmond.com.
- Jones, Dwight C. "2010 State of the City." City of Richmond Mayor's Office. Richmond
 Center Stage, Richmond. 26 January, 2010. Address.
- Kosmin, Barry A. and Ariela Keysar. "Summary Report." *American Religious
 Identification Survey (ARIS 2008)*. Trinity College, March 2009. Web. 14 October
 2010.
- Lears, T. J. Jackson. "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities."
The American Historical Review. 90.3 (1985): 567-593. Web. 14 September
 2010.
- Loveland, Anne C. and Otis B. Wheeler. *From Meetinghouse to Megachurch: A Material
 and Cultural History*. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2003.
 114-179. Print.

- Lunsford, Andrea and Lisa Ede. "Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked: The Role of Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy." 1984. *Engaging Audience: Writing in an Age of New Literacies*. Ed. By M. Elizabeth Weiser, Brian M. Fehler, and Angela M. Gonzalez. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 2009. 3-25. Print.
- . "Representing Audience: "Successful" Discourse and Disciplinary Critique." 1996. *Engaging Audience: Writing in an Age of New Literacies*. Ed. By M. Elizabeth Weiser, Brian M. Fehler, and Angela M. Gonzalez. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 2009. 26-41. Print.
- . "Among the Audience: Audience in the Age of New Literacies" *Engaging Audience: Writing in an Age of New Literacies*. Ed. By M. Elizabeth Weiser, Brian M. Fehler, and Angela M. Gonzalez. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 2009. 42-69. Print.
- "Maps and Statistics." Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority. www.rrha.com. Web. 5 February 2010.
- Marable, Manning. *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*. South End Press Classic Series 4. Cambridge: South End Press, 1983 and 2000. Print.
- "Megachurch Definition." Hartford Institute for Religion Research. n.p., n.d. Web. 14 October 2010.
- McGee, Michael. The "Ideograph": A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology." *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory*. Edited by Celeste Condit, John-Michael Lucaites and Sally Caudill. New York: The Guilford Press, 1999. Web. 22 September 2009.
- "Ministries Listing" www.richmondoutreachcenter.com Richmond Outreach Center, n.p., n.d. Web. 14 October 2010.
- Moss, Beverly. *A Community Text Arises*. Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, 2003. Print.
- National Center for Charitable Statistics. "Richmond Outreach Center Organizational Profile" Web. 14 October 2010.
- National Center for Charitable Statistics. "Richmond Outreach Center Real Estate Foundation Organizational Profile" Web. 14 October 2010.
- ROC Member. Personal Interview. 10 January 2010.
- "Richmond Outreach Center Inc. Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax." 990

- Finder*. Foundation Center 2001. Web. 14 October 2010.
- “Richmond Outreach Center Inc. Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax.” 990 *Finder*. Foundation Center 2004. Web. 14 October 2010.
- “Richmond Outreach Center Inc. Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax.” 990 *Finder*. Foundation Center 2008. Web. 14 October 2010.
- Richmond Public Schools Website*. <http://newweb.richmond.k12.va.us>. Web. 5 February 2010.
- Rozell, Mark J. “The Christian Right: Evolution, Expansion, Contraction.” *A Public Faith*. Ed. Michael Cromartie. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003. Print.
- Sarvay, John F. “The Crupi Report: The Art of Powerlessness.” Weblog post. *Buttermilk & Molasses*. 17 August 2008. Retrieved 10 March 2010.
- . “The Crupi Report: Fourth and Long.” Weblog post. *Buttermilk & Molasses*. 21 November 2008. Retrieved 10 March 2010.
- . “The Downtown Crupi Master Report Plan.” Weblog post. *RVA News*. 29 November 2007. Retrieved 10 March 2010.
- . “New Partnership, Same Conversation? Let’s Hope Not.” Weblog post. *Buttermilk & Molasses*. 11 May 2008. Retrieved 10 March 2010.
- Singh, Lisa. “The Prodigal Son.” *Style Weekly*. 11 January 2001. Web
- Smith, Craig. *Charisma and Christian Persuasion*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2000. Print.
- Smith, John E. “Time and Qualitative Time.” *Rhetoric and Kairos: Essays in History, Theory, and Practice*. Sipiora, Phillip and James Baumlin, eds. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002. Print.
- “Statement of Faith.” www.richmondoutreachcenter.com. The Richmond Outreach Center, 2010. Web. 14 October 2010.
- “Summary of Key Findings” *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*. The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2007. Web. 14 October 2010.
- The Barna Group. “Survey Explores Who Qualifies as an Evangelical.” Barna.org. The Barna Group, 18 January 2007. Web. 14 October 2010.
- The Kairos Theologians. *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church*. 2nd ed. Grand

- Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986. Print.
- “The 2007 Outreach 100.” Spec. issue of *Outreach Magazine* Volume 6 (2007). Web. 14 October 2010.
- “Tax Guide for Churches and Religious Organizations.” www.irs.gov. Internal Revenue Service, 2009. Web. 14 October 2010.
- Twitchell, James B. *Shopping for God*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007. Print.
- Vatz, Richard. “The Myth Rhetorical Situation.” *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory*. Edited by Celeste Condit, John-Michael Lucaites and Sally Caudill. New York: The Guilford Press, 1999. 226-231. Print.
- Vokurka, Robert and Stephen McDaniel. “A Taxonomy of Church Marketing Strategy Types.” *Review of Religious Research*. 46.2 (2004): 132-149. Web. 20 April 2010.
- “Vision.” Home Page. *Richmond City Council*. www.richmondgov.com/CityCouncil/ Web. 2 November 2010.
- Weber, Max. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. New York: Free Press, 1968. Print.
- White, Debbie. “ROC’ing Richmond.” Christian Broadcasting Network. Web. 5 March 2006.
- Williams, Michael Paul. “No vision, no heart, no chance.” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. 20 November 2008. Retrieved 10 March 2010.
- Williams, Rhys H. “Religion as Political Resource: Culture or Ideology?” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 35.4 (1996): 368-378.
- Winesman, Albert. “U.S. Evangelicals: How Many Walk the Walk?” Gallup.com. Gallup, 31 May 2005. Web. 14 October 2010.
- www.willowcreek.org. Home Page. Willow Creek Church, 2010. Web. 14 October 2010.
- www.saddleback.com. Home Page. Saddleback Church, 2010. Web. 14 October 2010.
- www.richmondoutreachcenter.com. Home Page. The Richmond Outreach Center, 2010. Web. 14 October 2010.
- www.newlife1.org. Home Page. New Life Outreach International, 2010. Web. 10 August 2010.

www.myspbc.com. Home Page. St. Paul's Baptist Church, 2010. Web. 10 August 2010.

Vita

Rebekah Anne Holbrook was born on December 30, 1982, in Charlotte, North Carolina, and is an American citizen. She graduated from Wilson Memorial High School in Fishersville, Virginia in 2001. She received her Bachelor of Arts in American Studies from The College of William & Mary, in Williamsburg, Virginia in 2005 and subsequently worked for Virginia Mentoring Partnership in the Division of Community Engagement at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond for four years. She received her Master of Arts in English from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2010. She continues to work at Virginia Mentoring Partnership and currently teaches English composition at John Tyler Community College.